DERMOT O'BRIEN;

OR,

THE TAKING OF TREDAGH.

A TALE OF 1649.

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MDCCCLI.



DERMOT O'BRIEN.

CHAPTER I.

> 'Then the wyld deere thorowe the woodes went,
> On every syde shear;
> Grea-hordes thorowe the greves glent
> For to kill thear deere.'
>
> CHEVY CHASE.

THE bright, warm sunshine of a July morning was pouring its full stream of vivifying lustre over a wide expanse of wild, open country, in one of the south-eastern counties of Ireland. For miles and miles over which the eye extended, not a sign of a human habitation, or of man's handiwork, was visible; unless these were to be found in the existence of a long range of young oak woodland, which lay to the north-east, stretching for several miles continuously along the low horizon in that quarter, with something that might have

been either a mist-wreath, or a column of blue smoke floating lazily in the pure atmosphere above it. The foreground of this desolate, but lovely landscape, was formed by a wide, brawling stream, which almost merited the name of a river, and which here issuing from an abrupt, rocky cleft or chasm, in the round-headed moorland hills, spread itself out over a broader bed, flowing rapidly in bright whirls and eddies upon a bottom of glittering pebbles, with here and there a great boulder heaving its dark, mossy head above the surface, and hundreds of silver-sided, yellow-finned trouts, flashing up like meteors from the depths, and breaking the smooth ripples in pursuit of their insect prey.

The banks of this beautiful stream were fringed on the farther side by a feathery coppice of aspen, birch and alders, with here and there a doddered oak overgrown with the broad-leaved Irish ivy; or a dark holly brake, relieving by their evergreen foliage the lighter verdure of the deciduous trees around them. Above this screen of brushwood the moorlands rose in a long expanse of gently-swelling, heath-clad ridges, now glowing with the purple bloom of the sweet heather and the mountain thyme, knoll above knoll, with deep hollows intervening, like the seas and troughs of a

storm-tossed ocean, until afar off in the dim distance they were bounded to the westward by the blue towering heights of the great mountain of Slievh-Buy.

It was perhaps ten of the clock, though there was little chance that the hour of God's day should be proclaimed in that declicious solitude by the iron tongue of man's machinery; where not a sound had been heard since the deep of dawn, except the rippling music of the stream, the low sigh of the soft west wind among the aspen leaves, the busy hum of the bees from the heather blossoms, and the occasional crow of the gallant gorcock from his station on the crest of yon sunny hillock.

No lack was there, however, of animal life to gladden the tranquillity of that lone moorlands scenery; the water-ousel, with his broad white gorget, now took his stand on the summit of some dripping stone, now dived into the clear stream, on the gravelly floor of which he might be seen a moment afterward running as briskly to and fro as if he had not three feet of water glancing above his head; the kingfisher shot down the channel, gleaming like a winged turquoise in the sunshine; the whiskered otter prowled along the pebbly margin, and plunged, and emerged again, with a five-pound brook-trout quivering in his iron

jaws; and, at length, while the hoarse summons of the heath-cock sank into silence, and the ousel and the kingfisher cowered beneath the shelter of the caverned bank, a magnificent grey gosshawk came gliding down from his mountain eyrie on his balanced pinions, and after wheeling hither and thither for a little space, alighted on the bare stag-horned crest of an old oak beside the stream, and ever and anon renewed the terrors of the feathered tremblers of the wold by his shrill, shivering cry.

But now another sound arose, faint and far, swelling up from the westward, on the wings of the gentle wind; a strange, confused, yet harmonious murmur. For a long time it continued rising and falling with the rise and fall of the breeze, scarcely distinguishable above the tinkling music of the river, and the fitful cadences of the air among the tree-tops, unless it were by something indescribable, save to those who have heard it, of wild, spirit-stirring, yet half-discordant music.

Still, however, it came nigher and more nigh, pealing up to the ear, had there been any human ear to listen to it, until the shrill, sharp, savage trebles, and the deeper ringing bass notes of a full pack of stag-hounds, running upon a breast-high scent, became distinctly audible. The falcon,

which, up to this time had sat motionless, as if she had been a portion of the weather-beaten oak, upon her airy perch, now spread her broad vans to the breeze, and darted away like an arrow from the bow, soaring up, up, into the empyrean, until she was almost beyond the ken of human vision, a mere speck in the azure firmament. The otter, which alone of the living things had maintained its ground in the falcon's presence, grumbling and hissing, cat-like, over its scaly prey, now raised its round head, erected its ears, and listened anxiously to the blended din which still rang nearer and nearer, until the echoes of the neighbouring hills began to reverberate the cry, and the copice itself, under the verge of which it lay, seemed to thrill and reply to the cheery crash of that dog-music.

Then launching itself into the glittering waters it oared its way with its webbed feet, and steered itself with its muscular tail down the glancing shallows, until having gained the deeps, it dived in the mid pool, and arose no more above the surface, until it had gained the shelter of its secluded holt beneath the tortuous roots of the water-loving willows.

A moment or two afterwards a brood of well-grown moor-fowl came whirring along

the wind from beyond the heathery knolls among which they had been flushed by the stag-hounds; and, crossing the bed of the river and its little valley, skimmed out of sight beyond the southern eminences. Ere this, the tongue of every several hound was distinguishable from its mate's; and the nice ear of a practised hunter could have perceived with certainty which of the pack were foremost on the traces of the quarry; and now the brushwood of the coppice began indeed to crash audibly to the ear, and quiver visibly to the eye, as if torn asunder by the passage of many bodies in swift motion.

A deep, hoarse croak was next heard; and, a moment later, a large raven, grizzled about the head with age, sailed over the low tree-tops, and perched itself secure and well satisfied on the very scathed oak-branch from which the gosshawk had so recently departed; then, almost ere its wings were folded, a noble stag, a royal hart of ten, as a forester would have termed him, with cupped antlers, broke from the underwood, almost as black from the effects of toil and sweat as the ill-omened bird above him—and after hesitating for an instant on the brink, plunged into the shallow river, dashing the spray high into the air, and, bounding with a sure foot over the

slippery and treacherous pebbles, rushed up the channel, until, as the headmost hounds appeared on the farther side, he turned to bay in a deep narrow cove or recess of the rocks, where both his flanks were protected by the abrupt crags, while for the front, his own broad and branching antlers seemed to be guard enough against a host of foes.

And need there was enough that the staunch quarry should be so guarded; for, yelling with redoubled zeal and fury as they ran from the scent into view, hound after hound plunged down the precipitous descent, and stemmed the rapid current in pursuit, until full twenty couple of black or brindled Talbots were raving at close quarters round the royal hart, hemming him in on every side, yet daunted by his bold aspect, and the fierce raking thrusts of his terrible brow antlers upon their gallant game.

Once or twice some bolder hound than his fellows would dash in with a shrill, snarling bay; but the pack hung aloof, and at each fresh assault the brave adventurer fell back gored by the horns or battered by the hoofs of the stag, till after each assault all seemed reluctant to attack again, and well content to bay and clamour at safe distance.

Meanwhile the stag, recovering gradually from his exhaustion as the fresh air blew full and inspiritingly into his wide-expanded nostrils, and the cool waters laved his foam-embossed flanks and panting breast refreshingly, wasted no efforts upon enemies which evidently dared not charge him home, but watched them with a wary eye, and lowered antlers only, and seemed to be abiding his time when he should burst through their clamorous circle, and trust once again to the fleetness of his well-tried foot.

But at the very point of time when he seemed to be almost in the act of bounding over their heads, and betaking himself once again to the brood moorlands, the gallop of a horse at full speed came charging up the rocky bank; and, almost simultaneously with the sound, a gallant steed and a gay rider emerged from the coppice, and stood out, drawn in clear relief against the glowing sky, upon the verge of a tall crag opposite.

The horse was sorely blown, however; and the declivity from the crag on which he stood into the channel of the brook was so steep and abrupt, that, had he been in the full vigour of his unwearied speed and strength, it would have tasked his powers

fearfully to try the descent over those slippery limestone ledges.

But as his rider cleared the covert, and saw the tumultuous and confused group almost beneath his feet, he pulled hard upon the bridle, and rising erect in his stirrups, uttered a long, clear whoop of joyous exultation; and then, without so much as pausing to collect his breath, raised to his lips the ivory-tipped bugle which hung at his right side, and blew the well-known cadence of the 'mort,' till wood and rock and mountain rang, and a faint answering halloo, and a far distant bugle-blast, responded to his note of triumph.

He was a tall and powerful young man, of some twenty-six or twenty-seven years, with a singularly dark complexion, fine black eyes, features of a keen, aquiline outline, and long, curled love-locks of the same hue with his eyes and strongly-pencilled brows, floating down over the collar of his doublet. He wore no hair upon his face—although that was the day of imperials and Vandyke beards, almost as much as it was of silken scarfs, and gilded spurs, and belted swords on the hip of every one claiming to be a gentleman by birth and lineage—except a small, dark moustache on his short, well-formed upper lip; but his dress, though evidently fashioned with

especial regard to the hunting-field, was both elaborate and costly. It consisted of a rich, half-military coat of bullet-proof buff leather, lined and slashed with tawney silk, and adorned with silver loops and fringes. His falling collar was of fine cambric, profusely frilled with the richest Flanders lace, as were the cuffs of his sleeves, and the knees of his buff breeches, thougn in the latter instance this costly decoration was concealed by the large tops of his heavy riding boots. He had shoulder-knots, and a scarf of rich, grass-green satin, and the band of his broad-brimmed, steeple-crowned beaver was of the same colour and material, all tagged and fringed with silver. A short buck-handled hunting-knife, or hanger, with a double-edged straight blade, hung from his scarf, and was the only weapon which he bore about his person, though the butts of a pair of silver-mounted pistols peered from the holsters at his saddle-bow · and the bugle, which he had just winded so skilfully and well, was suspended from a silver chain crossing the scarf and his left shoulder.

He made no pause, after the answer of his comrades reached his ear, but, seeing the nature of the ground, and its impracticable character for the surest-footed horse, sprang from his saddle in hot haste,

flung his bridle-rein over the gnarled bough of an oak stump, and unsheathing his bright keen blade, sprang down the rocks with the light steady foot of a practised cragsman. A minute, at the utmost, had not passed between the first appearance of the young cavalier on the scene of action and his springing, weapon in hand, down the craggy pass. The hounds, animated by his halloo and his bugle blast, had in the meantime rushed upon the hart with greater fierceness than they had shown before—and two or three had even fixed their fangs upon his muscular and glossy limbs. But these were beaten off, trampled or maimed, in less time than it has taken to describe it; and one, a superb jet-black bloodhound, of the true Talbot breed, 'crook-kneed and dew-lipped, like Thessalian bulls,' which had fastened on his neck, narrowly missing the jugular vein, was dashed down by a single blow of the keen cloven hoof, and the next instant transfixed and unseamed from the brisket to the shoulder-blade, by the brow antlers of the infuriate stag.

At the instant when the young man leaped from the last step of the limestone ledges into the clear cold water, which was so deep where he entered it that it took him to the mid thigh, and so swift, that, strong

as he was and muscular, it needed all his powers and agility to stem it, the fierce animal had disembarrassed itself of all its four-footed assailants, and now made at its human enemy with a front of resolute defiance, and a countenance which, merely animal and brutish as it was, seemed to express the mingled sentiments of mortal agony, despair, and resolution.

But, nothing daunted or irresolute, the youth rushed on to meet him, while the hounds, rallying again at the sight and presence of their master, bayed fiercely round his flanks and in his rear, although they dared not yet again to tackle him.

Just as they were closing in the mortal strife—for be it known that a stag at bay is no easy or contemptible antagonist, and a thrust from his antlers no child's play—the quick sharp clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the rocky ground came up against the wind from the south-eastward, in a direction exactly opposite to the approach of the still distant hunters; and it might have been at once conjectured by the eager youth that aid was at hand, had he needed it, if the ears of his mind had not been closed by the excitement of immediate peril to be met, and the mad ardour of the chase.

But, though he saw it not, a fresh spectator, if not actor, was brought upon the

scene of strife, in the shape of a tall, gaunt, thin-flanked man, with singularly broad shoulders, and wiry, muscular limbs, mounted upon a lean, ewe-necked, spur-galled garron, wretchedly accoutred with a rope bridle, and a tattered saddle, the wooden tree and straw stuffing of which were clearly visible through the worm-eaten canvass covering.

The countenance of the new comer was that of a man of some fifty-five or sixty years, harsh, resolute, and seemingly indicative of a character unchanged by time or hardship, and singularly unprepossessing, while it was purely Irish in its aspect and characteristics. The hair had been as black as the raven's wing, but was now grizzled, and as similar in colour as in texture to the short bristly clothing of a badger's back — for it was clipped close after the fashion of the Puritans, who, though as yet they had gained little foothold on the west side of St. George's Channel, were almost absolute masters in England — having a few months before perpetrated the unjust and cruel murder of one, almost the best of men, if he were also almost the weakest and the worst of kings. The brow was broad, furrowed, and almost knotted by the corrugation of its muscles; but, it receded villanously above the shaggy

iron-grey eyebrows, which overhung like pent-houses the deep cavernous hollows from the depths of which twinkled with a quick, malignant light a pair of small, dark, snake-like eyes, of which the sharp intelligence was the only redeeming feature. The nose was coarse, broad, and turned upward; and the wide, thin-lipped, compressed mouth gave token of no quality of mind, unless it were iron resolution; while the square massive jaws, and bull neck below, were more than usually deceptive in their prognostics, if they did not indicate the cruelty and fierceness of the animal they most resembled—the base and brutal bull-dog.

This odious-looking and repulsive personage was dressed in a plain, close-fitting doublet of black serge, belted about his middle by a broad strap of untanned calf-skin, from which swung at his side a long steel-hilted and steel-scabbarded straight blade, or tuck, as it was then termed, which was the favourite weapon of the Parliamentarians—and that which, in the hard hands of the Ironsides, had done such fatal execution on the heights of Naseby, and the red moor of Marston. He wore a steeple-crowned black hat, with neither band nor feather, and his garb was completed by a pair of gigantic riding-boots with funnel-

shaped tops extending to the middle of his thigh. He had no pistols at his saddle-bow, for it was evident at once that the beast on which he was temporarily mounted was no more a soldier's charger than the wretched pad which barely covered its galled back was a soldier's demipique ; but he had a long dudgeon dagger thrust through his girdle at the left side, and a short, heavy flint-locked musquetoon—at that time a scarce and much valued weapon—slung across his shoulder from the left hand to the right haunch.

As soon as the Puritan, for such he seemed to be, (though Puritan Irishmen were no common article in those days), came in sight of the animated group, composed of the man, the deer, and the hounds, crowded together in the narrow gorge of the stream between the steep and savage banks—fit scene for so mad and desperate an encounter—he pulled his wretched horse short up with an exertion of muscular force, which almost threw him on his haunches, brought down the muzzle of his piece under his right elbow, and with a quick movement of the left hand released the buckle which confined it to his breast, so that, within a second or two of his first appearance on the stage, he had his weapon in his hand,

posted and cocked, and ready for prompt action.

And well it was for the young hunter that his promptitude was both active and deliberate, for not a minute had elapsed before that military promptitude saved him from instant death.

He had not seen or heard, as I have stated, the approach of the stranger; and had he seen him, it is little likely he would have deigned to honour him with more than a moment's notice—for he was not only repulsive at first sight, even to a stranger's eye, but was one who to—what the young hunter evidently was—a noble and a royalist, was likely to be individually and peculiarly odious. But, ignorant of the presence of any witness to his fiery rashness, with a repeated whoop, he dashed at the charging stag, which met him nothing loath or fearful. As the maddened and desperate beast closed his eyes, and stooped his head to strike with his terrible brow antlers, as is the habit of his breed, the young man bounded lightly to one side, intending to evade the charge, and raising his keen weapon as he leaped, with the purpose of severing his hamstring as he passed him. But, though he leaped actively, and struck with a true hand, directed by a quick, sure eye, and steadied by a resolute and fearless

heart, he counted for the nonce without his host. And yet, as it was clear to see, it was to him no new or untried manœuvre, but one which had been put in practice many times, and until now, ever found available.

But such a feat of agility is one thing to practice with the good solid greensward under the booted foot, and no denser medium through which to spring than the elastic and intrindant air, and with the slippery limestone boulders of the river's bed from which to spring, and on which to descend—and the rushing volume of a stream running ten miles an hour, boiling and whirling round the limbs.

He sprang lightly, it is true, and alighted surely; but glass itself, or ice, were not more slippery than the water-worn and polished pebbles on which he landed from his quick bound; his feet flew from under him, and he fell headlong backward directly across the track of the charging stag.

Well was it for him then that he wore a garment surer proof than the ordinary Lincoln green of the hunter's frock; for the full thrust of the brow antler caught his right shoulder as he fell, and though the tough elk-skin of his stout buff coat turned it aside, that it pierced him, not as surely as it would otherwise, from side to

side, the force of the blow was so great that it fairly raised him into the air, and hurled him a yard farther forward than the spot where he would have fallen.

Then with a fiend-like burst of yells, the savage hounds rushed in, and seizing the infuriate deer by the ears, the throat, the fore-shoulder,—tore him down bodily into the brook, full on top of the young huntsman, biting, goring, trampling, and bleeding,—now below, now above the surface of the flashing and tortured water—and for a minute all was horrible and blind confusion.

But, once again the royal hart shook off his savage foes, and with a wild strange cry—half bray, half bellow, reared himself erect on his hind legs, rampant in glorious triumph, and tossed 'his horned frontlet to the skies,' preparatory, as he deemed, doubtless, to swift and sure escape.

No escape was there for him, however. For, whether wisely, friendly, or no, who shall say?—since at that moment the peril seemed, at least, to be over; but certainly with swift, instinctive coolness, and most fatal execution, the stranger discharged his musquetoon—and ere he could perceive the result of his quick aim, cast the piece from his hand, leaped down from the saddle, and drawing his long tuck, dashed to the river's edge.

But the instinctive aim had proved deadly, and the heavy fall had taken effect precisely where the matador directs the deadly thrust of his fine blade in the Spanish bull-ring—right at the juncture of the skull and spine—producing instantaneous death, and hurling the great stag, lifeless, upon the body of the stunned and half-drowned cavalier.

The stranger rested not content with the good or evil which he had done already; but plunged into the water, and dragged out the young gentleman in less time than it has taken to describe, and while the dogs tore and mangled the carcass of the dead hart unheeded, applied himself actively and skilfully to restore the suspended animation of the cavalier—though there was a strange expression in his face, which seemed to portend no good or kindly feeling to the sufferer.

Be that, however, as it may, his efforts were ere long successful, and the cavalier opened his eyes, at first with a vague and bewildered expression, which brightened in an instant, as they fell upon those hard, repulsive features, into a glance of mingled enmity and horror.

He started half up, and strove to regain his feet, while his right hand was moved with an instinctive impulse to the place

where his sword should have hung—while he exclaimed, in accents of fierce energy:

'You here! you! you!—Hugh O'Neil!'

'Even I, Dermot!' replied the other, quite unmoved, and apparently unconscious of the feelings which possessed the other. 'And, whatsoever ill I have done else in my day, the Lord be thanked, I have this good deed to boast, that I have saved the great O'Brien!'

'Ha!' answered the other, as he staggered feebly to his feet, and gazed about him uncertainly, as if scarce conscious yet what had befallen him. 'Ha! would that you had slain me rather! True! true!—you have saved me!'

The gloomy tone and yet gloomier expression of his fine features, as he spoke, showed that his words came straight from his heart, and were true to the very letter. But if he did indeed regret the obligation under which he was placed to one who seemed so hateful to him as the stranger, he was soon in a position in some sort to requite, if not efface it; for at this moment, the earth was shaken by the clang and clatter of a dozen horses at full gallop—and with a wild, fierce shout the retainers of the great O'Brien, as his rescuer had called him, came tearing over stock and stone to the spot, and in an instant's time, five or six

brandished blades were glittering above the stranger's head, and as many pistols were cocked and levelled within a hand's breadth of his resolute, unaltered features.

But with a strange, wan, bitter smile, the O'Brien waved his hand on high, and exclaimed :

'Hold! hold! Evil betide! He has saved my life, and must not lose his own, were he fiend himself, as he is blacker and more hideous!'

CHAPTER II.

'Unthread the rude eye of rebellion,
And welcome home again discarded faith.'
SHAKSPEARE.

At the words of the young cavalier, the points and muzzles of the threatening weapons were lowered, it is true; but the pistol-locks were not uncocked, nor were the swords put up into their scabbards. The brows, too, which looked of late so balefully upon the stranger, still gloomed upon him darkly, while a deep angry murmur passed from lip to lip of the wild vassals of the great O'Brien.

Bold as he was, the grim-visaged soldier gazed around him with an anxious eye on the lowering countenances and ready weapons of the clansmen, and turned from them to note the expression of their leader's noble features.

'Must I speak twice?' cried Dermot, in answer, it would seem, to this mute appeal, 'or is the life of the O'Brien so

small a matter in the eyes of his kindred, that they would pay the saving of it with the blood of the saviour? And thou, be thy name what it may, fear nothing! The word of the O'Brien is pledged for thy safety; and thou art as safe as if thou hadst tasted of my bread and salt, and wert standing on my hearth-stone.'

'Ireland is changed somewhat since I left her,' replied the other—who, if he had indeed been alarmed, had ceased to feel any apprehension, as in truth he had no farther cause; for at the words of the youthful chief, every weapon was returned to the sheath or the girdle, and many of the company applied themselves to couple up the bloodhounds, to drag the carcase of the hart royal from the stream, and to fetch their chieftain's horse across the water by an easy ford a little way below the scene of action. 'Sorely exchanged, I may say, since I left her. For in my day something more than mere safety had been the return for a life preserved, even by an enemy—much more by a kinsman and a friend. There were such words in old Erin as gratitude and guerdon, whatever there may be in the new.'

'If thou wouldst have reward, O'Neil,' answered the young man, his countenance lighting up with a quick, eager lustre; 'if

any price or gift can wipe out this ungrateful debt of gratitude, name it, and have it, were it half my earldom. For the rest, no enemy of the king is a friend to O'Brien!—no apostate from his God is Dermot's kinsman! Name thy reward, and take it, I say, Hugh O'Neil! And then, if thou be wise, as men say thou art, thou wilt remove thyself as speedily as may be from this neighbourhood. The air of Wexford is not wholesome, I have heard men say, for heretics or regicides: and sith thou hast saved my life, how thanklessly soever, I would not have it said thou hadst lost thine at my people's hands; which might well be, I trow, were my back once turned.'

'I would have reward, O'Brien, since I may not have gratitude. But, I tell thee, fair cousin; seeing a great earl's life, such as thine, is of no small value, so do I look for no small guerdon.'

'Cousin me not—for cousin am I none of thine, O'Neil; nor cousin will be called; for the rest, name thy price—the price of blood; in truth and deed art thou a second Judas! Name thy price, I say, man, and thou shalt have it, be it what it may; but I deemed not that even thou hadst been so base-minded!'

'And were I even as thou callest me, a second Judas,' replied O'Neil, with a

downcast visage, full of self-humiliation and self-abasement, 'thou art wise, Dermot, and knowest that even *he* repented!'

'And when he did so,' answered O'Brien, with a flashing glance of fiery scorn illuminating his dark features, 'I have heard that "he went and hanged himself," as I dare say thou wilt, when thy time of repentance cometh. But never did I hear or read that he carried back his infamy to be a shame to his tribesmen, or his penitence to be a plea for guerdon.'

'And would it then be thy advice, O'Brien, to one who, having perchance sinned deeply, had seen the error of his ways, and been touched to his inmost soul by grace, that he should go and hang himself, like Judas?'

'Methought that we spoke of guerdon—of the price of blood;' answered O'Brien, with unchanged contempt in both voice and manner—'and not of advice or atonement. If of the first, I say, as I said before, ask and receive! If of the latter, I am a soldier—not a preacher. Your new friends, I have heard tell, are both!—and doubtless, Major General Jones, commander for the saints in Dublin, will give you good and ghostly counsel! But look to it, in seeking his advice, however; for Ormond is without the walls, and will be apt to solve your doubts, if he lay hold on you, by giving

you a rope at King Charles' expense, in reward of your trusty services.'

'Faith, I am in a 'bad way,' replied O'Neil, with a grim smile. 'For sure am I, that Jones, the Puritan, will do the same if he lay hold on me, whatever Ormond, the Catholic, may do!'

'In a bad way thou art then!' said O'Brien, coolly; 'and very likely to be hanged, one way or other. For not Ormond only, but any true believer from Fair Head to Cape Clear, will bestow a cord on thee for old acquaintance, so surely as thy name is Hugh O'Neil! Had it not been for my stumble in the river, and the bullet from thy musquetoon, I had done so myself and thou hadst now been wavering in the wind, from yon oak tree-top, to feed that very raven which sits there, biding for the breaking of the deer. Speak, therefore, once for all! What wilt thou have of me? Thy presence is as a shadow in the sunlight, to the eyes of honest men; thy very breath is poison to my nostrils! Take what reward thou wilt, and get thee gone. I loathe the very sight of thee, not the less that I owe thee a life!"

A long pause followed, during which the young earl looked upon the other with that air of half-scornful, half-loathing curiosity with which men are wont

to regard some insignificant, but venomous and hateful reptile; while O'Neil gazed steadfastly, but gloomily, on the turf at his feet, beating the earth with his heel, as if he either felt indeed, or affected to feel, both anxiety and apprehension.

Then, after some two or three minutes had elapsed, O'Brien turned half on his heel, and called aloud to one of his attendants—speaking now no longer in English, but in the Erse tongue:

'Ho! Murtogh Beg!' he cried, 'bring hither the red stallion; and thou, Phadraigh, hold my stirrup. If he have lost his tongue, I cannot wait till he recover it. We have full twenty miles to ride home; and I am damaged somewhat by that brow antler. I know not but I have a rib or two broken. You, cousin Con O'Brien, and all, save you, Florence Desmond, see to the breaking of the hart, and entering the young hounds. Bran and his brother did good work all day, and led the hunt the last half-hour. Follow me home as quickly as you may; I must, I fear, ride slowly. Take heed, above all things, that none of the men harm him. Our honour is at stake! Let not one of them tarry in the rear, or their skenes will be at wild work presently. And you, sir,' he continued, turning to O'Neil, and addressing him in

English; 'since you will not tell me what reward you claim, take that!' And with the word he threw a heavy purse, well filled with French gold, at his recreant kinsman's feet. 'And then, if you have any regard for your neck, the sooner your foot is off the shore of Ireland altogether, or within the walls of Dublin, the better for your chance of saving it! Come with me, noble Desmond.

And as he spoke, he turned away disdainfully, without giving the slightest heed to the eager vehemence with which O'Neil stepped forward to address him, set his foot in the stirrup, and grasping the mane of his fine bay blood-horse with his right hand, raised himself painfully, and not without an effort, to his demipique.

But at that moment, stimulated by the urgent necessity of making himself heard now or never, the Puritan, if Puritan he were, sprang forward, utterly neglecting the well-filled purse on which he set the heel of his heavy boot in advancing, and standing right in the road, so that O'Brien could scarce ride on without overthrowing him:—

'Hold!' he cried—'hold!'—in tones that bespoke the intensity of his feelings—'Dermot O'Brien, hold! As you value your plighted word—as you value the ho-

nour of your house—as you would not be termed, of all who name your name, through unnumbered ages, the first ungrateful, the *one* mansworn O'Brien—hold! I say, and hear me!'

'I may not do else, thus adjured,' answered the youthful earl; 'yet little do I give heed to thy warning. But be brief, Hugh O'Neil; for it is no slight loathing which I conquer, in holding any parley with one like thee!'

'I will be brief, O'Brien. Only hear me.'

'Come near me, Con O'Brien; and you too, cousins James and Ulick; and you, Florence Desmond,' cried Dermot, casting his eyes hastily over the circle of his followers— most of whom were of his own clan and kindred. 'Come nearer to my stirrup. If I must needs converse with a traitor to his king, his country, and his Church, it must be before witnesses. And you, my men, call the pack to your heels and break the deer in the corrie yonder, where the clamour shall not reach us. Now, sir, what would you of us?'

'Protection from my foes—a life for a life!' replied the other, gloomily.

'Thou hast it. I have given thee already the assurance.—No man of mine dare harm thee for his life!'

'It is not from thy men that I fear harm, O'Brien; nor against them that I crave protection.'

'Against whom, then? If thou hast face to ask that I, whose house's honour you have stained by your apostacy—whose faith you have foresworn—whose friends and fellow-soldiers you have consigned to the dungeons or the scaffolds of your Parliament—that I should shield you from the indignation of your countrymen, the sentence of your Church—it cannot be! it is too much! Life were too dearly bought at such a bargain.'

'I seek no aid against my countrymen—and with my Church I am reconciled.'

'A double traitor, ha!' O'Brien interrupted him again, in accents of tenfold scorn.

'At least,' retorted Hugh O'Neil, no less proudly than the other, 'there is no nobleness nor much manhood in taunting one who is unable to reply, or in treading upon one who is down.'

'That is true, though the fiend himself had said it,' muttered the earl; 'and so get on with thee; I will interrupt thee no more.'

'I will make no long tale, nor utter any protestation,' replied the other, gravely, but not oversubmissively. 'Enough, that

if I have erred, I have repented of my error; and seek—nay, have sought, to amend it. I have seen license where I looked for liberty; I have found persecution where I looked for toleration; and when I found at last that the whole force of Cromwell and his iron army were about to be turned against my native land, I and a few bold spirits resisted — mutinied, they call it! But his iron will and indomitable energy was too much for us. He crushed us at a blow; the others were all slain on the field, or slaughtered on the scaffold; I alone have escaped by the speed of my horse and the fidelity of a few trusty friends. I am here with a price on my head; I am come to die for Ireland—the Church has absolved and pardoned me. Will you be sterner than the Church?'

This plain, unvarnished narrative did more, as is oftentimes the case, than eloquence or sophistry, to win the patient hearing and forbearance of his listeners; and it was evident that his twice-repeated assertion, that he was reconciled to the Church, had produced a considerable effect upon several of the gentlemen who stood around, and had even touched the firmer and less credulous spirit of the earl himself.

'And when fell all this out?' the latter asked, after a pause, in which he

seemed to ponder deeply; 'and, above all, what proof have you for the truth of your assertions? You are known for a shrewd wit, Hugh O'Neil, and a right subtle tongue. We can take nought of hearsay here for truth.'

'At Basford it fell out, nigh Salisbury. There he surprised us, and shot half-a-dozen in cold blood; and for the rest, this proclamation, and this copy of the Mercury, will vouch for the truth of what I say.'

And with the words, he drew forth from the pocket of his rusty doublet two documents; the one, a large printed proclamation, in the name of the Commonwealth of England, offering a reward of three hundred pounds for the person of the arch-mutineer, recanted Papist rebel, and relapsed malignant, Hugh O'Neil, late adjutant and captain of the Lord General's third regiment of Ironsides, to be delivered alive or dead to the first civil magistrate or military commandant of the united Commonwealth; and the other, an old copy of one of the newspapers of that day, much soiled and rent, but still legible This contained a full account of the review of the army destined for Ireland, in Hyde Park, on the 9th of May; of the discontent of the soldiers, as there manifested; of the subsequent arrest of Lilburne, sur-

named 'Trouble-world—not as it would seem without very righteous cause,' as the pious editor remarked; the outbreaks of the mutineers in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire; and of the vigorous suppression of the rebellion, and the execution of the ring-leaders at Basford, by the merciless vigour of Cromwell.

In this, also, Hugh O'Neil was mentioned as one of the principal leaders, as having been reconciled to the Church by a proclaimed priest, a worshipper of the Beast, who, despite the ordinances of the Parliament, had tarried in concealment, and wrought his iniquities in secret through the land, tempting Israel to sin, and the children of Israel to follow strange gods—even as the priests of Baal did in the days of Jehosaphat, the son of Nebat.

This Hugh O'Neil, it went on to say, had escaped from the pursuit of the dragoons by the speed of his horse, and had lain hid for some days, as it was afterwards learnt, among the ruins of Stonehenge—'a fitting place, in very sooth,' the holy editor remarked, 'was the blood-stained ruin of a heathenish high place to be the refuge and asylum of the worshipper of Antichrist, but was now believed to have made good his escape to the neighbouring island, where, no doubt, he would be heard of soon

amongst the bloodiest persecutors of the Saints, and staunchest upholders of the son of the Late Man.

After this statement, it proceeded to launch into a fierce diatribe against all Papists and Baal-worshippers and followers of the Beast —cautioning the elect people of the Lord to beware of them, even if they should profess to enter into the communion of the Saints, as whited sepulchres and wolves in sheep's clothing, seeking confidence only in order to betray; blasphemers and ungodly, who, without, are of mild speech and innocent seeming, but within are ravening wolves.

Over these documents, Dermot O'Brien ran his eye quickly, but observantly; and in less time than it has taken to describe the mass of mingled facts and commentaries, had extracted the truth, and skimmed over the hypocritical canting verbiage, which last he did with a bitter, but sarcastic smile.

'These papers, both of them,' he said, after a pause, handing them, as he spoke, to the eldest of his cousins, Con O'Brien, for his perusal, 'bear date of the sixth day of June. This day is the twentieth of July. Strange that we have not heard of this sooner.'

'Not strange at all,' replied O'Neil, 'seeing that an embargo has been laid on

all the ports of England until after the sailing of the General with his great army, destined to subjugate the land, and put every Papist to the sword who shall be found with weapons in his hand.'

'And when shall that sail?' asked O'Brien, half-tauntingly. 'Right glad shall I be to see that same great army landed here in Ireland. Methinks my Lord of Ormond will render a right good account of it; and the same sword to which the worshippers of the Beast are devoted, may, by our Lady's grace, be dyed red in the life-blood of the Saints. When shall Saint Cromwell sail, I prithee?'

'He should have sailed ere this — he should have sailed on the fifteenth day of July, but that the winds opposed him.'

'And how came you hither then?'

'I escaped very hardly through the North Countries into Scotland, and thence across the Straits by a row-galley, from Port Patrick to the Island of Magee. Thereafter, as best I might, I journeyed southward, hoping to find you with the Lord of Ormond, before Dublin. But you were not there when I reached the camp.'

'Have you been in the camp, O'Neil? —and how are you not there in safety?'

'I was in safety while there was a camp, but——'

'There *was* a camp. In our Lady's name! what mean you? speak! man, speak!'

'The night before the last, I entered the camp before Dublin, with a safe conduct from our good father Mac Odeghan, who reconciled me three months since in Cheshire, to the earl, and thought to tarry there until your joining with your people, which they told me should be ere many days. But with the dawn yestermorning, Jones broke into our quarters with his whole garrison, five thousand strong, drove in the outposts ere the alarm was given; and before the earl was in his boots, or his men under arms, had cut the host in two parts, and wheeling to the left, doubled it up upon the river and destroyed it. Four thousand men were slain, twenty-five hundred prisoners, at the least, and the earl is in full retreat upon Tredagh. The siege of Dublin is raised, as sure as you sit there silent and astounded; within a week Cromwell will be upon us with eighteen thousand men—the flower of that victorious army—which has ridden over the generous and noble valour of the English cavaliers, and the dogged resolution of the Scottish Covenanters, unscathed and unbroken. Within a week, the country will be swept far and near by the merciless dragoons, and unsparing Ironsides, to whom our

people are as the Philistines, and the children of Ammon to the Israelites of old, heathen to be hewn down unsparingly, and their slaughter held good service to the Lord. Safety will be to none but those who band together in strongholds, and trust for defence to the mortal sword. Dermot O'Brien, I will serve you well. Will you afford me shelter, a home, a name, protection?'

'Can these things be?' cried the young earl, perfectly crushed for the moment, and thunderstruck by those dread tidings.

'By all my hopes of pardon!—by all my trust in God!' exclaimed O'Neil, solemnly.

'In which God, O'Neil?' asked Dermot, again speaking with a sneer; for involuntary suspicion crept into his mind whenever he heard his apostate kinsman quote the Bible, or allude to the religion from which he had once fallen away: 'the God of our fathers, or the God of the Saints, as you call them?—Hugh O'Neil, how can you ask us to believe you?'

'What should it profit me to lie to you—a lie, if it be one, which must be discovered with to-morrow's sun?'

'I know not. Thou wert ever politic and astute, Hugh; and as I now bethink me, even in thy childhood, given somewhat to lie!—and yet, as thou sayest, what should

it profit thee?—For, by my soul, if a lie it be, and by to-morrow's dawn I *will* know it, thy carcass shall swing living from the scathed pine upon the summit of Slievh Buy, until the ravens shall devour thy false heart-strings. Wilt thou abide the trial? Bethink thee?—Thou hast time; I owe thee still my life. If thou be guilty, take thy purse, for thine it is, and get thee gone. Three days' grace shalt thou have and law, ere I or mine pursue thee! Go with us if thou wilt; but by all that I hold most dear and most holy, if thou *have* lied to us, the doom which I have said is thine to-morrow.'

'I will abide it! I will go with thee!—and if I have spoken truly?——'

'It shall be with thee as thou wilt. Soh! silence there! silence those bugle-notes! This is no time for minstrelsy or glee! If this be true that he hath told, we may be called ere long to sound the mort for Ireland's freedom! To horse, my men! to horse, and home in silence!'

CHAPTER III.

' Day set on Norham's castled steep,
And Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
And Cheviot's mountains lone.'

SCOTT.

No farther words were spoken after the last commands of the O'Brien had found their way to the ears of his attentive and obedient vassals. The quartering of the deer—a ceremony in those days still observed with much of the old feudal pomp—was left to the wild foxes and wolves—for there were wolves yet in Ireland at that time—and to the ravens of the wild moorland hills; the bloodhounds, which had received already their share of the spoil, were coupled up half-surly and insatiate; girths were tightened, and weapons looked to with some care, and the little party got to horse and proceeded on their homeward route, with graver faces and less buoyant hearts than they had ridden forth in the morning.

The young Earl of Thomond—for such

was the true title of the young chief who was generally known among his countrymen as the great O'Brien—rode perhaps a hundred yards in advance of his retainers, between the two elder and most trusted of his comrades, his cousin, Con O'Brien, and the gentleman whom he had addressed as Florence Desmond—and to whose counsel and suggestions he appeared to pay unusual deference.

This latter, unlike his kinsman, the younger O'Brien, who was little more than a fine-spirited young cavalier, was a man somewhat advanced toward the middle age, though not so much so as to have lost anything either of physical or mental vigour; and was one, whom, from a mere casual glance, a stranger would have pronouced to be acquainted with the world, both of courts and camps; and so, in truth, he had been.

In age, he was not, perhaps, so mature as he appeared, having been worn considerably by the fatigues of war, and exposure to all kinds of weather; and, though he looked a man of forty years, he had not probably, passed his thirty-second summer. In person he was very tall, measuring considerably over six feet in height, admirably built, and broad-shouldered in proportion to his stature; otherwise he he was thin-flanked, and so slender, al-

though deep-chested, that he might well have been called thin, had not the round and starting muscles of his limbs shown clearly that it was the fatty portions of the human frame alone which had in him been kept down by toil and activity, while all the rest was hardened into brawn and sinew.

In a word, he was one of those rare specimens of human perfection, whose stature and proportions are so admirably adjusted, that their pre-eminence of size is unobserved, until it is measured by comparison with some near standard; and then the observer starts to find that he whom he has taken for an ordinary man, is in truth a Hercules in power, though almost an Antinous in grace and symmetry.

He was not, like his kindred and companions, dark-haired and dark-featured, at least, orignally; though now his skin, on the face, neck, and hands, where it had been changed by the weather, was scorched to more than gipsy swarthiness from exposure to hotter suns than the light mist-wreathed shores of the green Island.

His brow, however, where the brim of his beaver, or the peak of his casque, which with him had been the more usual head-gear, had kept off the sunbeams, was as smooth and as white as a lady's forehead; and his eyes were of that deep steel-grey

which is so rarely found but in persons of peculiar temperament and superior qualities. The colour of his hair, as it had been of old, was no longer easily discernible; for it was now so streaked with lines of wintry grey, and was worn so thin by the pressure of the helmet, that it resembled more in hue the mane of the roan courser which he rode than the lovelocks of a cavalier. It had been once, however, of the deepest and richest chestnut that ever decked the head of mortal man, and as remarkable for its luxuriance and soft wavy flow, as for the splendour of its colouring, and the play of light and shadow on its almost metallic masses. The only point in which this fine tint was still perceivable was the pair of heavy drooping moustaches which he wore after the Spanish fashion, concealing the whole of his upper lip; all the rest of his face being close shaved, contrary to the fashion of the day—at least, in France and England.

His other features, though fine and nobly-formed, were not such as would have led any one to call Florence Desmond a handsome man: and yet there was a changeful play of expression over those strongly-marked lineaments, which could not fail both to attract and rivet the attention. The ordinary character of his face,

when in repose, was grave and solemn thoughtfulness, approaching at times to what might be called heaviness of aspect; and never, at any time, even in the most violent action, the most eager and thrilling excitement, did the high, haughty countenance exhibit that glow of physical and passionate enthusiasm which kindles in the veins of the young and ardent. At the most moving instants, whether of action or deliberation, the quickest expression that ever lighted up his aspect was a sort of sharp, hawk-like keenness, purely mental in its character; and at such moments his thoughts seemed to rush with instinctive rapidity, and his deeds almost to anticipate his own volition.

His manners were calm, grave and dignified, almost to coldness; and tinctured with a dignity of air and gait, perhaps derived from the Spaniards among whom he had served long, and with great distinction, which led superficial observers to believe him intolerably haughty. In speech, unless when greatly moved, he was somewhat slow, sparing of words, terse, never trite, though often sententious; but when moved, his eloquence was as impetuous and copious as the mountain torrent—as penetrating as the subtle lightning.

Such, in brief, was the appearance, such

the exterior character, of a man who had already played a great part on the great theatre of the world, then crowded with the actors of one of its mightiest dramas. Scarcely a country; not a quarter of the globe, in which his sword had not been drawn. Banished by his religion from his native land, he had taken service with the Spaniards, and learned the art of war in the best school of tactics, and the finest armies then in Europe; nor had he quitted them until the horrors and barbarities in the Low Countries had disgusted him with the standards of the Don; though not till he had fought beneath them against the Moors at Oran and Ceata, and against the Buccaneers beyond the Line, on the coasts of the American terra firma. Again in the Morea, and on the Asiatic mainland, he had crossed swords with the Janizaries and Spahis under the winged lion of St. Mark; and in a word, with the exception of the British isles, in which his sword had never seen the light, there was no European country in which the name of Florence Desmond was not known as a man both of counsel and of action.

The dress of this distinguished soldier was very different from that worn by any of his fellow-hunters, being entirely foreign, both in cut and materials. It con-

sisted of a close-fitting *just au corps* of plain black velvet, with jet buttons, but without lace or ornament of any kind, loose breeches of the same fabric, with a row of jet buttons down the seam, and heavy riding-boots of Cordovan leather, with large Spanish spurs of bright steel. His hat was a regular sombrero, with one long drooping feather; and the only weapon which he wore was the old-fashioned Toledo rapier, above four feet in length, with a steel basket-hilt and scabbard.

With regard to the other gentlemen who composed the party, it is needless to say more, than that they were, without an exception, fine looking, active youths, clad in the usual attire of the British cavalier of that day, and well skilled in his usual accomplishments. High-spirited and brave, they were of course, for they were Irish gentlemen, and nurtured from their cradles upward, above the reach of any low idea of sordid consideration; but it must be said likewise that there was no more distinctive force or originality of character among these nobly born and nobly-nurtured striplings, than between these heroes of the Æneid, whom the Mantuan poet has contented himself with specifying as Gyas the strong and strong Cloanthus; and even this distinction was lacking among these; for, save O'Neil,

the stranger, and their chieftain's guest, Florence Desmond, there was not one man present from Con, his father's brother's son, down to Phadraigh, the dog-keeper, whose name was not O'Brien.

Immediately in the rear of the earl, but about a hundred yards behind him, rode a couple of stout, well-armed men, faithful retainers both, and clansmen, whose duty it was to wait especially upon his person, and to look after his safety in those times of treachery and bloodshed. After these again followed three persons, of whom Hugh O'Neil was in the centre, between two of the earl's younger cousins, Ulick and James O'Brien, both of whom were thoroughly upon their guard, seeming to look upon their apostate, and now, as he said, repentant kinsman, rather in the light of a prisoner than of a guest. For they interchanged no words with him of any kind, while they kept a quick watch upon his every movement; so that, although no personal restraint was put upon him, and he retained his weapons, even to the musquetoon, which he had reloaded since it had done such good service, he would have found it no easy matter to escape, had he desired to do so, from the party.

It did not appear, however, that he entertained any such idea; for he jogged

along quite contentedly, spurring the miserable garron he bestrode to its best pace, in order to compel it to keep up with the high-bred and gallant coursers, which, despite of their morning's gallop, fretted and chafed against the bit, as if they had not run a mile. After a while, he drew out a short, dingy pipe, from the pocket of his doublet, crammed it with Virginia tobacco, and, striking a light by means of a flint and steel, which he produced from the same receptacle, began to smoke as assiduously as if his life had depended on the maintenance of a dense volume of white smoke about his ill-conditioned features. This, which is now almost a national habit and peculiarity of the Irish, especially of the lower orders, was at that time almost unknown in that country; nor was it prevalent, to any great degree then, among the cavaliers of the neighbouring Island: although with the Puritans and Parliamentarians, most of whom were of the middle classes, it was very general; and as O'Neil resorted to it, probably as much to kill the time, which hung heavily on his hands in his social solitude, and to keep up the appearance of recklessness and hardihood, the gentlemen of the company drew themselves up in their stirrups even more stiffly than before, and casting at one an-

other contemptuous glances, began to snuff the air, as if it were polluted, muttering, loud enough to be clearly heard, plain maledictions on the low-breeding of the heretic apostate; and alluding to it as a trick which he had caught in the barrack-rooms of the Ironsides, or the conventicle of Praise God Barebones.

Little, however, did the object of their animadversions appear to care for them or their insulting comments. His end was gained, when he had obtained permission, how ungraciously soever it were given, to follow the O'Brien to his castle; and that accomplished, like a true philosopher, he took no heed for what he could not remedy, and affected to observe what in reality made the blood boil in his veins.

It needed many hours of riding to bring them to the demesnes of the O'Brien, so intricate and circuitous were the passes through those wild moorland hills, and so difficult was the nature of the ground through which the wild horse-track led, never allowing them to move faster than a trot, and frequently keeping them at a foot's pace. But if their progress was slow and wearisome, so delicious was the soft summer weather, and so lovely the wild, romantic scenery through which they rode, that had not the minds of all the leaders of the party

been preoccupied by anxious and gloomy thoughts, the journey would have been one of unmixed pleasure.

The nearer they approached to the grand mountain masses of Slievh-Buy, the bolder became the whole face of the country, the more steep and abrupt the successive hills which they had to scale, the more deep and shadowy the glens which were threaded by their winding road. The open, rolling expanse of the heathery moors was changed for a very labyrinth of knolls and craggy ridges, feathered some half-way to the summit with fine hanging woods, but bare above, and crowned with naked piles of scarred and splintered rock. The intervening hollows were no longer smoothly sloping vales, with broad trout-streams wandering though their gentle laps, but, at first, deep-wooded glens with brawling brooks foaming and chafing over fall and rapid, and then precipitous rock-walled ravines, watered by actual torrents, all alike, trout-steam, brook and torrents, working their devious way westward to join the distant Slaney.

Meantime Slievh Buy itself, which showed from the spot where the stag was slain in the forenoon, only as a huge perpendicular wall of cerulean shadow looming up grand and massive against the lustrous morning sky, now glimmered out resplen-

dent, as the waning sunbeams fell on it, mellowed only by the soft mountain haze, in its true character. Its salient buttresses of living rock stood out in broad relief, while its dim gorges and ravines, umbrageous with dense forest, gloomed in their purple shadows. Here, seen at intervals on the bare steeps, and lost again to view in the woody hollows, a long, sharp streak of silvery radiance would indicate the swift descent of a mountain cataract: and there, against the sky, a giant pine would rise conspicuous and sharp, so towering was its stature, even at that far distance.

Often as they advanced, and became more and more entangled in the passes, the road, after climbing some precipitous ridge, would descend at so sharp an angle as compelled the cavaliers to dismount and lead their good steeds by the bridle, into some black, whirling torrent, walled on the farther side by sheer ramparts of rock, and affording neither space for a track, however narrow, in the bottom, nor any egress on the farther side from the abyss. In these defiles—no less than four of which occurred before they arrived at the base of the great mountain ridge — the party plunged unhesitatingly into the waters, and rode for a considerable distance — in one instance above half a mile—either up or down the

channel—often more than belly-deep, and always with much difficulty and some danger, so slippery was the pebbly bed, and so strong the stream, before the road—if road it could be called—again emerged on the farther side.

At the last and longest of these passes, up which the active Irish horses scrambled with splash and bound, climbing a rough, shelving rapid, down which the arrowy waters foamed as if down a giant staircase—although no mortal form was seen, nor any sign of human life, the party of O'Brien was thrice hailed from the summits of the cliffs, or from some crevices in their black treeless sides, by a wild, shrill yell, which seemed to syllable articulate words in some strange language, and to each of which the earl replied by a single *mot* on his bugle-horn, after which no farther sound was heard, nor any opposition offered to their progress. It did not fail, however, to occur to the shrewd mind of O'Neil, acute by nature, and sharpened by all resources of the military art, that this occurred in each case at points of the defile where the windings of the channel, and the commanding elevation of the crags, would have exposed the party to be cut up by a cross-fire from front, rear, and both flanks at once, should an active enemy be in possession of the

two sides at once of the ravine. Nor did he doubt, in the least, that this was the case; and that out-lying bands of the kernes of the O'Brien clan were scattered throughout all the lower ranges of the hill country, with an especial view to the defence of the passes which led to one of the great fastnesses of that powerful family.

As these thoughts passed through the mind of the dark and wily renegado, bold as he was, and accustomed to rely for the defence of his head on the strength and sleight of his own hand, he could not so control his feelings, but that he turned somewhat pale, when he considered how many times that very morning he might have passed within point-blank range of either ball or arrow—for bows were still, even in that day, the primitive weapons of some of that wild people—of those who, had they recognised, would have slain him with less mercy than they would have shown to the felon-wolf, before he had obtained the unwilling safeguard of the O'Brien's company.

One of the youths who rode beside his bridle-rein noted the change which blanched his features; and, looking full in his face with a sneering smile, said, with a bitter emphasis and a slight foreign accent:

'It is no easy thing for an enemy to

enter the O'Brien's country. Voices are not heard unless hands are nigh: and willing hands find ready weapons.'

'I know both the O'Brien, and the O'Brien's country!' was the short, stern reply; for the man was not alarmed, but startled only, and had manned himself on the instant.

'It is well for you you do!' answered the other. 'For then you know, that if it be hard for a foe to enter, it is yet harder for a spy to quit! For the traitor, every heather-bush holds a musket or a skene, every oak-tree a halter, every cairn a grave!'

'Best take heed then that you find them not a subject, or a tenant!' answered O'Neil, with a grim smile. 'For me, I neither heed your counsels, fear your menaces, nor seek your friendship! Go, boy, talk with your equals; when I reck to converse, it will be with your betters!'

'My betters!' exclaimed the fiery Celt, his hot blood flushing to his brow in crimson. 'Thou converse with my betters! Seek them in Heaven, then, or, where thou art more like to journey, in the depths of——'

'Hold!' interrupted the calm, grave voice of the great O'Brien, who, attracted by the loud tones and impassioned accents of the

angry speakers, had turned just in time to anticipate a catastrophe: for the blade of a long, keen knife was already glittering and brandished high in the hand of the clansman. 'Hold your hand!—for shame! would you strike a hostage, and him under safe conduct? Go to the rear, sirrah, and give up your arms to my brother Ulick, until you know better how to use them. And you, O'Neil, spur your horse hitherward; and if you be wise, as men say you are, keep a shut mouth and a humble tongue. There be none here who love thee—none who do not suspect—many who hate thee! But my word is plighted for thy safety, and thou art safe for this night, from any mortal power to harm thee.'

The clansman, hot as he was, and fiery, thus rebuked by his great chief, had not a word to offer in reply. The flush faded out from his burning brow; the spark died in his passionate eye; he sheathed his skene on the instant, and, drawing it from his girdle, together with the sword which he unhooked from the hangers, delivered them, deeply humiliated, to his cousin. This done, he reined his charger up till all the party had passed him by, even the lowest menials with the laggards of the pack, and fell in gloomily, the last of the train.

Meantime, O'Neil spurred up his wretch-

rd garron sharply, and making his way between the horses of the two armed vassals, came up immediately behind the chief. But, unlike the youthful clansman, he took the rebuke bitterly and almost haughtily, muttering as he rode along: 'Hostage!—hostage, forsooth! This comes, I trow, of saving a man's life—and that man a kinsman too!' But as he came within close ear-shot of the earl, he ceased his low muttering, raised his voice to its natural pitch, and said boldly:—

'Safe for this night, my lord earl! And is that the extent of your power, or of your will only, I beseech you? And shall I *not* be safe to-morrow? For if the latter be your meaning, I will see if a clean pair of heels may not preserve my head a little longer than your gratitude seems likely to respect it.'

'Little would your heels, or your hand either, as you well know, O'Neil, avail you! For were I but to frown on you and shake my head, or to turn my bridle-rein and leave you, three minutes would, I trow, be long measure of your life.—Irish skenes make sharp work, and that very presently. For the rest, you know the terms; if your tidings be true, protection at least, if we may not give friendship! If false, a halter! For to-night, therefore, you

are safe as a hostage, and every hostage is a guest; so be our guest to-night, O'Neil —let to-morrow bring with it, as it may, life or death, joy or sorrow.'

'Good faith! if it rest on that alone, full small concern have I,' replied O'Neil, 'for what I have told you is but the simple truth, and the more you search it out, the surer you shall find it.'

There was so singular an expression of triumph and exultation in his voice, as he referred to the certainty of his ill-omened tidings, that the young earl felt all his former apprehensions and suspicions of the man returning on him unabated, or rather with increased force; although a few minutes before, he had been strongly inclined to put some faith not only in the tale of which he was the bearer, but in the truth of his repentance, and return to the faith of his fathers.

He now fixed his eye upon his face coldly and sternly, and shook his head with a dubious air, as he said in a low, sad voice:

'Alas! O'Neil, alas! for the days are gone, before thy delinquency first took from me that best and most fleeting of humanity's delusions—man's mutual trust in man! I wish even now to think of thee as of one erring, yet not lost. And lo! as if to

rebuke my misplaced confidence, comes that dark sneer upon thy lip, that tone of triumphant joy in thy voice, speaking of things most ruinous to the cause which thou now callest thine. Thine eye is enkindled even now with the wolfish-blood thirst of the Puritan gladiator; thy voice exulteth as thou wert enraptured at the success of the savage, Independent Jones—How, then, may I trust thee?'

'Good cousin, mine, and great Earl O'Brien,' answered the other, without showing the least emotion at the half-affectionate expostulation of his kinsman, whose generous nature, all averse naturally from suspicion, recoiled from the doubts which were so odious and repugnant to its frank spirit—'were you ever in such pleasant circumstance as to know that it depended solely whether you should break your fast to-morrow upon grouse-pie and malvoisie, or dance a coranto in mid air, with your neck instead of your heels, quivering on the tight-rope, upon the truth or falsity of a reported story, methinks you would be somewhat apt to make merry at the knowledge that an inch or two will not be added to your stature, by the lengthening of your neck before daylight—even if that knowledge were purchased by the certainty of what were otherwise unmissed

disaster. How say you, my fair kinsman?'

'That I trust I shall be dead in very earnest, or ere the certainty of ruin to my country and my king should lead me to rejoice. I think—I hope—I should be found more willing to die, even upon the gallows-tree, assured that they were prosperous and safe, than to owe my escape from that foul and disgraceful doom, to the certainty of their destruction. But who can say that he knows himself? Perchance, Hugh O'Neil, I have wronged thee?'

'You have wronged me, Dermot,' answered the other, his face lightening up somewhat at this sudden and unexpected alteration in the earl's tone. 'You have greatly wronged me, for I protest——'

'Protest nothing, Hugh!' the young nobleman gravely interrupted him. 'I never have known any good to come of protestations; and for the rest, if I have wronged thee as thou sayest, thou art an injured man; and injured virtue should be not loud but silent. But now a truce to this! Thou art my guest for the night at least; and if the morning shall prove thy tidings true, and that thou hast in all sincerity returned to the true faith, from which an evil hour and a false villain's tongue seduced thee—in all sincerity returned to the service of thy country and thy king,

never was erring son so welcomed home to the hearth-stone of his father's house as thou shalt be to the clansmen of thy mother's race ; never were such rejoicings raised for one thought dead, and suddenly found living, as shall be raised for thee, my cousin. And lo! even as I speak, the turrets of my father's house. May it be an omen!'

'An omen!' replied O'Neil, enthusiastically, 'a good, a glorious omen!—an omen that I shall sin no more, and thou learn again to trust thy kinsman, never again to be deceived.'

And as he spoke, he extended his hand cordially, and in the warmth and fervour of his high and noble heart, Dermot O'Brien grasped it, and wrung it cordially, in the full sight of all his half-astonished, yet rejoicing vassals. For the Irish heart is a strange, fitful instrument, easily played upon and awakened to the softest and most touching melodies, easily, alas! jangled to the saddest and most stormy discords. And now, as the clansmen beheld their chieftain, whom they almost worshipped as the best and noblest of mankind, grasping the hand of the repentant renegado, they deemed, in the simplicity of their honest impulsive souls, that all was surely right, now that the earl had pardoned him ; and brandishing their arms aloft, they gave vent to their

wild joy and transport in a long burst of triumphant yells and shouts, full of that thrilling frenzy which marks all outbursts—whether gay or gloomy, whether fierce or fond—of the feelings of the yet unreclaimed and unconquered Celtish races.

It was a lovely scene, and a grand spectacle combined. The setting sun poured its broad golden light over the animated moving group, horses and men, and noble hounds with all accessories of glancing arms, and waving plumes, and gay vestures, glittering in the foreground ; for they had just ascended to the brow of a steep, bare-topped hill, across which the road ran in full view of the glowing heavens, and thus caught every ray of light that streamed nearly level from the westward.

Below the brow on which they stood, the ground fell away in a long slope, covered with rich woods, to the verge of a broad tract of lovely meadow-land, all clad in the unchanged emerald verdure which is especially the characteristic of that soft-climed and fertile island. Through this sweet lap of dewy meadows, now checkered with bright lights and broad blue shadows, projected from the leafy knolls and clumps of scattered trees, a wide and noble river rolled slowly to the southward, the largest tributary of the majestic Slaney.

Beyond this, ridge above ridge, and forest above forest, uprose the lower heights of the great mountain of Slievh Buy, and above these again pre-eminent, and seeming to stand almost midway between the base and the cloud-capt summit of the huge mountain, upon a vast bare ledge of precipitious crags, fronting the westering sun, with its long lines of sweeping walls, its massive turrets, and its vast keep, towering above all like an earth-born giant, shone out from the dark woods around, and behind it, the old baronial castle, time honoured home of the O'Briens, glorious in the red lustre of the dying sunset.

The banner of the king waved high above its topmost tower; and higher, higher yet, above the banner-staff and glittering blazonry — above the misty pinnacles of the huge hill—yea! and almost above the golden clouds, which hovered like a glory round its peak, there soared on balanced wings, distinctly seen, although so far aloof against the glowing sky, a solitary eagle.

O'Brien's quick eye caught it on the instant, and pointing upward with his right hand, a proud gesture, and a flashing eye, as the majestic bird rose higher yet and higher, he exclaimed, as if in allusion to the last words of O'Neil:

'Is that too an omen?'

Even as he spoke, the sun sank behind. the western hill, the royal banner fluttered for an instant, and was slowly lowered, while the evening gun boomed from the battlements; and in that very point of time the eagle swooped, plunged like an arrow downward through the cold grey mist, and was lost to the sight in less than a second, amid the purple shadows which enwrapped the colossal outlines of Slievh Buy.

Alas! for the self-deceiving heart of man!—whether of these two was the omen—whether the lie of the false prophet!

No word more spake O'Brien. Perhaps the contrast touched his imaginative mind, He gave his horse the spur, and galloped down into the smooth valley at the top of his pace, followed by all his train, eager to gain the castle, ere the last glimpse of daylight should desert them.

CHAPTER IV.

'A perfect woman nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a spirit still, and bright,
With something of an angel light.'
WORDSWORTH.

THE sun had long set before the little cavalcade, crossing the valley and the broad river by the old stone bridge, arrived at the base of the main mountain of Slievh-Buy. After passing the great stream, two several glens, each with its foaming tributary, had been traversed; and now a third, darker, deeper, and more difficult than any which had yet been encountered; and as they descended into its black abrupt ravine, the waning light which was fast fading in the western sky deserted them entirely, and it was only by the deep angry roar of waters that they could judge of the force and volume of the torrent into which they were to plunge.

The road leading downward into this

darksome gulf was scarped and hewn by the pick and chisel, out of the solid rock which walled the chasm, and descended by three steep traverses from the summit of the crags to the level of the stream; but its soil, which was evidently artificial was soft though firm, and afforded a good foot-hold to the hoofs of the active and sure-footed Irish horses. As they rode down into the lower gloom, it grew not only palpably obscure at every step, but so damp and cold from the thick mist-wreaths and spray of the torrent, that O'Neil's teeth chattered audibly in his jaws, and his hand shivered, so that he could scarcely hold his horse. They reached the bottom, and a broad black pool lay before them, with a few wreaths of foam floating round and round in its whirling eddies, and embossing its dark surface, like spume flakes on the glossy hide of a coal-black charger; while at a short distance upward, to the right hand, stood erect, though wavering to and fro in the darkness, and momently changing its aspect, what looked at first like a gigantic sheeted phantom, but what was in reality the great descending column of the mountain cataract, whose roar they had heard for the last half-hour. Downward to the left hand, nothing could be perceived, but the salient angles of the perpendicular walls of the ravine—their

bases lost in the blackness of what seemed a fathomless abyss, whence rose the hoarse voice of the tortured river raving in impotent rage against the obstacles which barred its headlong way.

Even by day it was a fearful pass; at night it was most perilous; and unable to judge the depth of the sullen ford, or even to distinguish the mouth of the mountain road on the farther brink, he must have been a rash and reckless man who would have attempted to ride it at that hour, and in that fading light. Dermot O'Brien himself, to whom every turn and pass in those hills was familiar from his boyhood, drew his rein doubtfully, and paused at the brink of the ford; until one or two of the kernes, who had ridden in the rear with the hounds, dismounted, and came running down the road to the master's stirrup.

'Torlogh,' said be, addressing the first comer, a wild, shock-headed varlet, having his hair hanging in *glibbes* or knotted elflocks over his shoulders—and wearing the old national costume of the shirt of saffron-dyed linen, with a coarse scarf or mantle of green woollen stuff above it—'Torlogh, the waters are up, I think, since morning. There must have been rain in the hills since we crossed at daybreak. I cannot see the

guide-stone on the other side, and I doubt it is not passable!'

He spoke in the Erse tongue, and in the same his vassal answered him, in a few brief accents, during the utterance of which, he cast off his cloak and his brogues of untanned hide, and made himself ready to plunge into the stream.

O'Brien remonstrated and half forbade him, but the wild vassal would hear no denial, but stepped fearlessly into the water, which, before he was ten feet distant from the bank, took him up nearly to the armpits.

'It has risen!' he exclaimed. 'Hold back, my lord, it is very strong—it is——'

But ere he had completed the sentence, he was swept off his legs by the force of the stream, and whirled down the channel, striking out powerfully, and swimming high and strongly, till they lost sight of him in the deep shadows.

'Come back!' shouted O'Brien, greatly moved at his peril. 'Come back, I command you, Torlogh! You were insane to try it—and I scarce less so to permit the trial. Come back, I say! I will not have your blood on my head—and you my foster brother!'

But the other man, who had accompanied Torlogh to the brink, and had been care-

fully examining the state of the water, now raised his voice and shouted as loud as he could: 'Hold over, Torlogh, boy—hold over! Four strokes more will stem it!' And then turning to the earl, who was not well pleased at hearing his orders countermanded thus,—'To turn back would be sure death, if it please you!' he said. 'Before he could face the eddy he would be swept over the black boar's back, and plunged into the hell-kettle, down below there! The current is strongest on this bank, and will set him over!'

The earl made no reply; but his heart was very full, and his anxiety was almost irrepressible; for the man was a favourite, both as a faithful and favoured follower, and as the son of the woman by whom he had been himself nursed—a connection which was considered at that time, and in that country, as second only to a close blood relationship.

To all it was a minute of extreme and torturing suspense, and every one listened as if his life depended on his ears, for the least sign that should tell of the swimmer's whereabout. It was about a minute, however; for the stream was not twenty-five yards over, although the peculiarity of its scenery, the indistinctness of the light, and the exaggerated idea of its importance

derived from its arrowy rush, and deep melancholy roar, caused the bystanders—even those who knew the place—to over-estimate the time, and perhaps the peril.

Within a minute, however, a wild, cheery shout was raised on the other verge, announcing the safe landing of the hardy clansman, at a point some twenty or thirty paces lower down the stream than that where they stood, and a second or two afterwards, a bright spark of light was seen opposite, and then a clear glancing blaze as he kindled a splinter of dry bog pine—stores of which lay piled in the clefts of the ravine—and waved it above bis head.

'Here is the white mark stone!' he shouted, 'but its head only is above the foam. Tarry, awhile, and stir not for your lives, until I light a beacon up that shall guide you. I think too,' he added, 'that the stream is lowering even now.'

'That is good counsel, anywise!' said the old man who had shouted before, and who was no other than the O'Brien's chief huntsman, and Torlogh's paternal uncle. 'He will soon build a pile of bog pine, that will make the pass as light as noonday; and the stream is lowering too, for a certainty. It has shrunk half a foot since I stood here. ook you, my lord!—this black stone was vered but now!'—and with the word he

struck the massy top of a black boulder with his hunting pole,—and now the water is six inches below it!'

By this time the light on the farther shore began to increase in size and volume, and to send up long wavering gleams which kindled all the fantastic crags, and the wreathed roots of the old fir trees, which grasped their flanks in coils like those of giant serpents, and showed the dark figure the clansman flitting about his pyre, collecting fuel, and heaping it with an unsparing hand, until the strong glow rushed up, roaring and shooting out strange rocket-like jets of flame, and bright flakes of fire among the volumes of white smoke. Then a broad wake of light furrowed the ripples of the stream to the very feet of the little party, and the clear glare illuminated the whole gorge, playing upon the swarthy features and bright arms of the clansmen, and bringing out the rocky pass above them in strong relief, and rendering the whole ravine, in truth, as the old huntsman had said, as bright as at noonday.

'Bravely done, Torlogh! Bravely done in faith!' cried the earl. 'Now we may, indeed, cross over safely; and by my faith, the torrent has shrunk in its bed a foot since we reached it. A little higher up, O'Neil! —a little higher up, I say;' he added,

riding a little way up the bank toward the cataract, before entering the water. 'So shall you have space to allow for the drift of the brook, which is still strong and deep. Keep your nag's head well to the current, and steer for the gravel shoal there—ten feet or so on this side the beacon.'

Then, without farther words, the brave young lord spurred his strong charger down into the channel; and though the horse was reluctant to face the whirl and rush of the eddy, he managed him with such consummate skill and power, that after a floundering plunge and a few violent bounds, half-galloping, half-swimming, he took ground on the further bank, and carried his rider gallantly across—the foremost man of all his train—in less than ten seconds after he had entered the ford.

Convinced that there was now no real danger more, and stimulated by the energy and example of their chief, the whole band plunged in together in a compact body, and stemming the stream, and breaking its current by the opposition of so large and powerful a mass, easily struggled through it, and gained the other side without accident—even to the miserable garron of O'Neil, which was rather pushed across by the impetus of the stronger chargers than by any efforts of its own; and which had scarcely

ascended the gravelly ascent before it stood stock still, now utterly exhausted, and positively refused to move a pace under any application of the spur or thong.

This difficulty was, however, speedily remedied—one of the vassals being dismounted, and O'Neil installed in his saddle; and without further delay, by the light of Torlogh's brands, on which a reinforcement had been heaped before starting, they climbed onward up a long scarped pass, traverse above traverse, like those on the other side, toward the castle of the great earl—the lights of which were now seen glistening above their heads, among the foliage of the great trees which surrounded it. The length of the pass, however, and the steepness of the ascent, prevented them making very rapid progress; and the keen eyes of Hugh O'Neil soon assured him that the length and steepness of the way would be the least of the impediments to be encountered by an assailing force in an attempt on that stronghold; for he could see that every traverse was now commanded by a breastwork constructed on the top, as well as by crenelles worked in the face of the rocks, the latter communicating probably with caverned galleries quarried in the hill, whence the whole road could be swept by a direct, plunging fire. In addition to

this, they passed three fortalices, constructed at the re-entering angles of three distinct traverses, whose massives arches of masonry, battlemented and flanked by round towers, each provided with a double portcullis of hammered iron, crossed the gorge from side to side, and must necessarily be stormed one by one, under a terrible cross-fire, before the castle itself could be approached.

These formidable outworks were now, however, all undefended—the watch-towers untenanted, the portcullises drawn up, and the great iron-studded portals standing unbarred and wide open. There were no signs of decay, however, or neglect; on the contrary, the masonry was all sharp and clean, and seemed to have been pointed recently; the iron-work was free from rust, and over the two upper arches some pieces of ordnance of heavy calibre appeared to have been mounted newly, and were provided each with its pyramid of shot piled beside it.

After passing the last of these gates, they landed on a small level esplanade of rocky soil, studded by a few enormous pine-trees, which stood, however, so far apart as to afford no shelter to an enemy from the guns of the main fortalice.

This rose on an abrupt knoll of rock

above the tops of the highest of these trees, divided from the esplanade by a vast dry ditch, hewn in the rock to a depth of fifty feet, and an equal width—a veritable work of giants—isolating the castle altogether from the main hill. For it was situated on a small, craggy peninsula, the isthmus of which was cut across by this ditch, jutting out from a lower spur of Slievh-Buy, and facing the main mountain, from which it was severed by the same torrent which they had passed below, flowing at the foot of precipices inaccessible even to the foot of the wild goat.

A grand old Norman pile it was, built evidently by the invaders of the Isle, soon after their first landing, to curb the bellicose and fiery natives, whom their superior arms and iron discipline had but enabled them half to subdue. But more fortunate than many of its sister fortresses, which had even then fallen into ruin—some by neglect and the fallen fortunes of their owners, some by the devastating tooth of Time, and some beneath the dint of Elizabeth's artillery in the great rebellion of Tyrone and O'Neil—this noble place of strength, known as the Red-Rock Castle of O'Brien, still towered sublime and perfect upon its earthfast base, and overlooked leagues and leagues of the surrounding country from the proud

eminence upon which, it was perched like an eagle's eyry.

It had consisted, in the first instance, like all Norman holds, of one huge central keep, or dungeon, a tall square tower, with small octagonal turrets, one at every angle, buttressed and bartizaned, crenelled and machicolated, according to the utmost science of that day, for the vantage of all the weapons then invented. This keep, perched on a central knoll, and domineering all the lower defences, consisting of a strong single rampart with many flanking towers, a castellated gate-house and drawbridge over the ditch, had been originally the sole dwelling within the circuit of the walls; but with the growth of time, the wants and luxuries of men had grown likewise, and building after building had been added in accordance with the milder tastes of the times, till the whole area within the gates was filled with noble and commodious buildings, suited rather, as they seemed, for the court of a sovereign prince than for the dwelling of any private subject, however high or mighty.

By this time it was as dark as it ever is on a summer's night in the British islands. The moon had not yet risen, and the faint glimmer of the twinkling stars was intercepted on one side by the great pine trees which I have mentioned, and on the other

by the towering masses of the huge mountain chain, on a spur of which the fortalice of the great earl was situated.

It was evident, however, already, that the clank of their horses' hoofs had been heard in the castle, and that the party was both looked for and expected; for lights were appearing and disappearing in all the windows of the main building, and a bustle of footsteps and hurried voices was audible in the courtyard, hurrying toward the gatehouse.

Before O'Brien had time to raise his bugle to his lips, which he did as soon as he drew up his horse near the verge of the dry ditch, upon what would be the glacis of a modern fortress, a torch was displayed above the gates, and a loud voice was heard challenging the new comers.

'It is I!' cried the earl, 'I, the O'Brien! Down bridge and up gates—for if you within be not tired with waiting supper, I am without, I assure you.'

A loud shout was the answer, and an eager hum of welcome; and in a moment afterwards the creaking of the hinges and the clash of the heavy chains announced the lowering of the drawbridge, which soon extended its frail and narrow length across the deep black fosse, and echoed hollowly

beneath the hoofs of the horses as they entered.

The gates were thrown wide open, and a broad glare of light was thrown far out into the bosom of the darkness, from the yawning porch, for all the interior court was blazing with links and cressets, in the hands of a numerous assemblage of wild-looking clansmen and vassals; and beyond this the great doors of the castle stood wide apart, the focus of a clear illumination with several figures, male and female, drawn sharp and distinct in relief against the lustrous background.

The earl fell back a pace or two as the company rode into the court, and spoke a word with his younger kinsmen whom he had previously addressed as Con and Ulick, in the Erse tongue, which he seemed to suppose that O'Neil had never understood, or forgotten—for it was evident from the glance of his eye and the gesture of his hand, that it was of him he was speaking.

'Keep him back,' he said, 'or take him aside with you to the stables or the kennel —or I care not where: but I would not that my mother or Ellinor should see him till they are prepared; and I would fain speak also with Father Daly. Do you mark me, cousins?'

'Had I my will,' answered Ulick, quick-

ly, 'I would have him aside, and that right speedily, into the castle dungeon, there to abide until we shall have learned what he is—whether rebel, spy, traitor, or renegado —and then, in any count, a short shrift and a long rope. Either way, he has earned it!'

'Hush, Ulick, hush!—and remember, if he were the devil, he has saved my life this very day.' Then raising his voice, and touching his horse with the spur, he pricked on to the side of O'Neil, who had paused irresolute, when he found that his entertainer and protector was behind him, well knowing that he was like to find small favour in the eyes of the retainers. 'Ride round with my cousins, O'Neil, to the stables, and bestow your steed,' he said, 'and then join us in the hall. It is meet that I announce your coming, ere you meet the eyes that will be upon you when you enter. You, Florence, tarry with me. I would two words with you. Away to the stables, and the kennels, all of you,' he added, addressing the loiterers, 'and give the gentlemen light to bestow their steeds. You, Hardress, call me the seneschal, and come back with a torch.'

The page, to whom he spoke the last words, a handsome boy in a green velvet *justau corps*, and plumed bonnet in his hand, who had held his lord's stirrup as he

dismounted, gave up the charger to a groom, and hurried away, leaving the O'Brien alone with Colonel Desmond, under the arch of the gate-house, with no other person near him but two or three porters and underwardens, who were busy lowering the gates and securing the portcullis.

'This is all vastly disagreeable, Florence,' said the earl—and he now used the French language, which he spoke with the fluency of a native—'and very doubtful also. I do not half believe his tidings; and yet I think he dare not attempt such deceit, nor can I see his motives.'

'I *do* believe his tidings, Dermot,' answered his friend; 'though no man can say what may or may not be his motives; and as for daring, I believe the want of courage is the only vice O'Neil was never charged with. But I assure you, as I said before, I do believe his tidings.'

'The more reason for precaution, then,' said the earl, thoughtfully. 'But, true, or false, it will never do to leave the outworks open any longer.'

By this time the page, Hardress O'Brien, a distant kinsman of the earl's, had returned, and with him came a venerable old white-headed man, of great height, and of a frame still powerful and robust, in spite of his advanced years.

'There are strange tidings on the wind, McCarthy,' said Dermot to the old follower of his house, who had once been the page of his grandsire, and after that his father's banner-man and avenger when he fell at Edgehill fight; 'strange and ill tidings; and though I doubt their truth, I would have all the gates of the pass closed, and watches duly set this very night, and constantly hereafter, and all the ordnance loaded. Whom will you set in command?'

'I will go down myself to the low port, my lord, with ten men. Dennis McMorrough and old Shamus More can take the other wards, each with five of the people. I will see all secure within an hour. But what is this they tell me, good my lord—that the black traitor, Hugh O'Neil, is in the castle court, and not in chains, nor ordered for the dungeon?'

'Tis even so, McCarthy. Had it not been for him, I had been slain this day, or sorely wounded——'

'I would you had been sorely wounded rather than owe escape to him. From being nigh slain, had there been any chance of that, he would not have stirred hand or foot to save you, unless for some base end. But, surely, surely, you will not suffer him to tarry here with your noble——'

'Hush!—not a word of that, not a breath

a hint, as you love me, McCarthy. Here he must tarry, for this night at least: and mark me—for my word is pledged and my honour at stake for it—in safety and in honour too! But fear nought for me, McCarthy; my eyes are open, and I will watch and judge; and if he think to deceive, on his own head be the consequence. He vows that he is reconciled to the church, and has returned to the standard of the king.'

'The Lord forbid that I should fight by his side under it,' replied the old man, doggedly. 'But it is yours to command, noble earl, and mine to obey. Good night to your lordship; all shall be safe shut and ward set within the hour. Ho, Shamus More, and you, Dennis Mac Morrough, turn me out twenty men of the warden's guard, with torch and pike, within ten minutes.'

'You hear, Florence,' said O'Brien, turning toward his friend, and speaking in a melancholy tone, with a dark brow and downcast expression—'you hear—the same from every one!'

'I looked to hear nought else,' answered the colonel, 'from ganrulous old superstitious veterans, like good McCarthy, and yonug, over-boiling hot-heads, like cousin Con and cousin Ulick. But I did look to hear something very different from the lips

of a man of the world, a man of action, and a man of counsel like yourself, my noble friend. This fellow is a miscreant—granted! A traitor, and it may be a murderer! Well, we know it, and are upon our guard! Shrewdly suspected of false dealing toward your honourable father, we will watch, and may detect him! In all this I see nought for apprehension. That he has his own ends to accomplish in coming hither, I doubt not; and from the character and known disposition of the man, it is most like that those ends are evil. Still he is in our power, and I see no cause for alarm, though much for watchfulness, much for suspicion. Whither do your doubts point, my lord?—for sure I am that they point to something tangible.'

'Not very tangible, good friend. Yet I will tell you. He was ever a favourite of Father Hyland Daly, and his most chosen pupil. Even after his infamous apostacy I have heard the priest sigh when others cursed him; and sure I am he will now receive him as a penitent, and welcome him back with open arms.—Then you know, Desmond, how strange and paramount an interest this Daly has with my mother, and even with my own sweet Eily—'

'You cannot fear him *there*, O'Brien,' returned his friend.—'If she were capable of swerving now—nay, of hesitating but one

instant—the tenth part of one thinking-time —I should say let her go, and well gone! But that is impossible; you cannot, I repeat, fear that.'

'It is indeed impossible; and I do not fear *that*, if by *that*, you would say her good faith, her absolute affection, or her unstained honour. But his hypocrisy, his machinations, his fiendish subtlety, and unmatched ingenuity in falsehood, I do dread, and I confess it. Right certain am I that the tidings of my approaching marriage have had far more to do with his coming hither, than any mutiny of Ironsides in Hyde Park, or sally of Jones from Dublin, or sailing of the arch fiend Cromwell—whom may the Lord confound;—from Liverpool or London.'

'Why, then, in the name of all that is wonderful, did you allow him to come in hither, if you think of him thus?'

'He saved my life, Florence Desmond.'

'And therefore would you put a dagger in his hand to destroy your happiness? That deed was an act of ordinary impulse, done probably without reflection, on the spur of the moment—certainly without danger to himself. It was what you or I would have done for the meanest kern in the land, without an instant's thought about the matter. There is a monstrous deal too much

made always about this matter of preserving a life. I have saved fifty men's lives, in my time, from water, from fire, from the sword, from the plague, from the halter; and never been much thanked for it.'

'You would not have had me turn my back upon him, Florence Desmond. To do so would have been to tell the first of my followers who crossed his track when I was out of sight, to knock him on the head, or shoot him like a houseless dog. Neglect from me now were his death-warrant.'

'There is something in that, Dermot,' answered Desmond, after a moment's pause, 'but not very much after all; for he knew all that when he entered the O'Brien country, before he had dreamed of having even a chance to assist you. Nay, more—he must have known that in all probability you would yourself shoot him down as a traitor to the king, and an open enemy, in case of meeting with him on the moor. In spite of all this, he thrust himself into your way of a set purpose; and chance so far favoured him that you can scarcely shoot him now, I grant that.'

'But what would you do with him, were you I, Florence?'

'Hold him in honourable ward until we learn if his news be false or true—hold him under guard in his own chamber, allowing

him to see no members of your household, save Con or Ulick, and your own page, Hardress; and least of all, the priest, for whom, between ourselves, I have a good deal less of reverence than you have—and should have none at all, but that he is a priest; though, in God's truth, I believe him to be little more of that in heart than I am. He holds, it seems to me, some most strange doctrines; though, Heaven be thanked, it is my business only to hear, and not to judge, O'Brien.'

'It were the wisest way, in truth. Would God that I could adopt it.'

'And what hinders?'

'My word. I told him I would treat him as my honourable guest.'

'Even so. But not as your trusted confidant. Appoint me as his warden. I will treat him with all honour, and may, perchance, learn something that may serve us over the Border.'

'Would not that be to keep the promise to the ear, and break it in the spirit.'

'Not a whit—not a whit!—here he comes; at all events, commit him to my charge until you have consulted Eily; and hark you, tell no one else of his coming until you have her counsel.'

'Be it so. You are a wise friend, Florence, and a true one.'

. He wrung his hand kindly, and turning on his heel, hurried across the step towards the castle-door, which still stood open, although all the other persons had withdrawn into the interior of the building, on seeing that the train had all returned in safety, except one tall, slender, female figure, who stood on the threshold, conversing eagerly with the page, Hardress, and looking anxiously toward the gate, as if in quest of O'Brien.

Without another word, the young earl hastened to the foot of the flight of tall stone steps which led to the castle-gate, while Desmond took a few steps in the other direction, to meet O'Neil and the young men who were now returning from the stables, and already near at hand.

'Is it you, Dermot?' cried a sweet low voice, as he mounted the steps—'at length, you? We have tarried for you very long, and feared that something had befallen you.'

'Something has happened to me, Eily,' replied the earl; 'but look not so grave for that, dearest. It is nothing so very desperate or alarming—though certainly it is not altogether pleasing, or such as I could have desired.'

'I have seen it. I knew it, from the first moment you dismounted, and stood so

long in deep converse with Florence, instead of hurrying, as is your wont, to join us, on your return home. I have been questioning Hardress this last half-hour.'

'Ha! Your reason, fair lady, was a good and true one; for who would tarry, talking with a great Low Country colonel, who might be basking in the light of your eyes, Eily? But what said Hardress—ha?'

'Hardress either knows nothing of the matter, or is as close-tongued as beseems a lord's page to be,' answered the girl.

'Or a fair lady's either, Mistress Ellinor,' replied the boy, who was a favourite, laughing gaily. 'I have heard tell that the lady's page has often more need for a close mouth than the earl's esquire. But in truth, for this time, I knew nothing of the matter. I only saw that a marvellous ill-looking stranger rode into the castle with my lord's train, and so I told fair Mistress Ellinor.'

'Are you sure that he was a stranger, Hardress?' asked the earl, with a quiet and somewhat sad smile. 'Think, boy—have you never seen that ill-favoured countenance before?'

'Jesu Maria!' exclaimed the youth, with a sudden start, and a motion of his hand toward the hilt of the gay dagger which he wore at his girdle—while a keen glance of

intelligence and recognition gleamed, like a flash of lightning, over his handsome features. 'It is he!—it is he! How could I ever have forgotten? But who should have looked to see him here, here in the Red Castle of O'Brien, unless as a prisoner led hither but to die? But it is he!'

'It is who, Hardress?' cried the girl, bending her eyes upon his face with an expression of anxiety amounting almost to terror. 'Tell me—who is it? I knew that there was something wrong.'

'Go to my mother, Hardress,' said the earl, laying his forefinger on his lip, with a warning glance at the quick-witted boy, 'and say to her that I beseech her to put back the supper yet half an hour longer; for I have tidings from the city of importance; and then pray his reverence to meet me in my private study forthwith, as I must speak with him before supper. Be quick, boy; there is no time to lose. Then to the stables and the kennel, and tell all those who rode with me, it is my pleasure not one word be spoken. Now, cousin Eily,' he continued, turning to the beautiful girl, 'if you will give me half an hour of your time, I will tell you what has fallen out, for I want your counsel. Where can we be most private?'

'Come with me,' she said quickly;

'come to my own withdrawing room. But why did you send for Father Daly, if you would talk with me? It is not courteous, Dermot, to keep the good father waiting.'

'Courteous or no, I did it purposely. I would not have his keen eyes prying into matters prematurely—his long ears drinking words which I would have him weigh before believing—or his sharp tongue asking questions which I desire not to have answered. But come, dearest, come!'

And with the words he took her by the hand and led her up the last flight of steps within the embrazure of the castle-door, and entered the great oaken hall of the fortalice, all glittering with lights reflected from a score of clear steel panoplies, and flashed back from a hundred polished weapons.

She was indeed very beautiful, and of a style of beauty perfectly characteristic of the isle which gave her birth.

Considerably above the middle height of women, and of a slender and elastic figure, her whole form was so exquisitely rounded, so fully swelling in its soft womanly outlines, that, although her waist was but a span, her neck and delicate throat, swan-like in its long drooping curve, and her wrist and her ancle shapely and small as a child's; the general character of her shape was of

plumpness and mature perfection, though she was in reality scarcely advanced beyond girlhood.

Her face was of the perfect Grecian outline, and her complexion as pure and white as that of the fairest Saxon maiden, though it was warmed by the glowing tints of a blood richer and more genial than runs in the veins of people of more northern nations. Her hair was black as the raven's wing, and like that, shadowed with a glittering metallic lustre that glanced in the light of the torches with a warm purple radiance; and it was so profuse that it fell down in a flood of luxuriant ringlets over her dazzling shoulders, below the verge of her velvet corsage. Her brows were of the same colour, strongly defined, and full of character; and the long lashes of her great deep-blue eyes, relieved by the clear hues of her transparent cheek, showed like a fringe of glossy silk.

Her gait was beautifully easy, graceful and swimming as the motion of a bird in the air, or swan on the waters—such as is said to be peculiar to females of that Spanish blood which is believed by many to flow in the veins of the noblest children of Green Erin; and of a surety, both in birth and character, Ellinor Desmond was of her very noblest.

Such was the girl who moved gently and

tranquilly, yet with an anxious heart and downcast eye, by the side of the proud young earl; and so fair a specimen did they present of young mortality that the boy Hardress gazed on them earnestly and long, with a wistful eye, and muttered to himself with a half-murmuring sigh, before he turned away to obey his lord's behest:

'God's benison upon their heads! Who ever saw so bright and beautiful a pair in all Green Erin! And they are good as they are beautiful and bright. God's benison upon them!'

CHAPTER V.

'And, for that right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.'
TENNYSON.

THE apartment into which the young earl led the lady of his love—for such it may be admitted she was, and one in every way worthy of his distinctions, whether natural or social—was a low-roofed square room, raised a few steps above the level of the neighbouring chambers, and looking through a large mullioned oriel window into a small spot of garden, situated in the very centre of the castle, and overlooked only by the battlements of the tall square towers which surrounded it on every side but this by their blank and windowless walls.

It was for this reason probably that Ellinor Desmond had selected it as her own withdrawing room, or bower — as ladies' apartments are still sometimes called—and it was, perhaps, the only one in the castle fitted, from its seclusion and conveniences, to be the abode of a young and delicate

girl, almost alone, in the midst of a society of rude and half civilized clansmen.

The entrance to it lay through an ante-chamber, communicating by a narrow passage, on either hand of which was a small chamber for attendants, with the grand reception saloon of the castle, in which the mother of the earl — a stern old stately matron of the olden school, who remembered the civil war of the great Tyrone, and the iron rule of Elizabeth—was wont to sit in cold and solitary state.

There she was not, however, as the young and handsome pair passed through it on their way to Ellinor's bower—being, in consequence of the page's message, absent upon these hospitable cares intent which had not as yet been devolved upon menials. In the ante-chamber, however, there were three pretty, gaily-attired maidens employed—two about their embroidery-frames, and one reading aloud some merry French romance; for their laughter was heard, fresh and musical, before the earl and his fair companion reached the door of the room in which they sat.

They all three rose on the entrance of their lady, and courtesied gracefully, and with more of a lady-like demeanour than we should now expect from mere servant maidens; but at that period, when the lines

of distinction between the commonalty and gentry were drawn so much more broadly than at present, the personal attendants of the great and noble were for the most part drawn from the humbler branches of their own families, or composed of the young aspirants of other noble lines, who scrupled not to perform what we should now deem menial offices, until their term of servitude should fit them, in their turn, to command others.

The former of these cases was most general with the female portion of the household, except for ladies of the very highest rank of nobility, who were waited upon by gentlewomen of birth and breeding—the latter with pages and equerries, who rose gradually to the rank even of knighthood itself—when knighthood was not a mere empty name—and were often of birth as noble as he whose cloak they brushed, or whose spurs they buckled to his heel.

And in the present instance, one of her pretty girls in waiting was a far-off cousin of her own; while the two others were—what was in those days and in Ireland accounted a yet nearer connexion—her foster sisters; and all three had been brought up with their young mistress in a French convent, as was very usual among the Catholics, both of Ireland and Great Britain;

and hence, in no small degree, the grace and courtesy of their demeanour, and assuredly the fluent use of the French tongue.

Without pausing, however, longer than to say a kind word *en passant*, Ellinor Desmond and her lover passed into the little room which formed her own peculiar sanctum, and which communicated through a small oratory, with its lamp burning before the sweet picture of Madonna, its *prie-dieu*, and its velvet hassocks, with the garden beyond.

That was a gay and cheerful little chamber, lighted up as it was brilliantly by a flashing fire of bog-pine which blazed brilliantly on the hearth—rendered agreeable by the cavernous thickness of the castle walls, and its elevated site, surrounded by unshorn woods and dashing waters, and by the gleam of two huge candles, home-manufactured from native virgin wax, burning in antique silver candelabra.

The walls were wainscoted with dark bog-oak, almost as black as ebony, pannelled in exquisitely-wrought compartments, between clustered columns and fretted ogives, of the same material in elaborate relief. The dark hues of this woodwork were relieved, in the first place, by the exceeding brightness of the polished surface, which reflected the lights like a mirror; an

in the second, by a number of fine cabinet pictures, by the best masters of the English, Flemish and Spanish schools, all at that day nearly in their prime of perfection, set off by massive gilded frames, one of which hung in the centre of each compartment. The curtains which mantled the single deep window, the draperies of the oratory, the cushions of the large soft settees and arm-chairs, the very cloth of the round table, strewn with books, *bijouterie*, musical instruments, writing materials, and articles of female fancy-work—the name of which is legion—were of rich crimson velvet, deeply laced and fringed with gold. A spinet, the piano-forte of that day, and a superb Irish harp completed the furniture of the lady's bower ; but among its decorations were two or three articles not yet enumerated, so characteristic of the time, and so illustrative of feminine employments in the good days of old, that they should not be passed over without notice.

In a deep Gothic niche, above the fire-place—which was itself a quaint, low-browed arch, richly carved, yawning above a wide, open hearth—stood a full suit of tilting armour, of the finest Milan steel, azure, engrailed with gold, complete from spur to plume, with the shield slung about the neck, the lance in the gauntlet of the right

hand, while that of the left rested on the pommel of the heavy straight sword, the dagger of mercy in the girdle, and the hammer-at-arms and battle-axe lying crossed, at the feet of the effigy.

The whole of this superb panoply was as efficient, as bright, and in as perfect order as if it had been intended for immediate use; yet the fashion of the armour was obsolete; and the use of complete suits had already passed away, even among leaders, as inconsistent with the rapidity of modern warfare, and of little use against musquetry —of none against ordnance. The meaning, however, of that suit in that position, and of its careful preservation, was displayed in a gilt-lettered scroll beneath the alcove on which it stood. The words ran thus quaint in device, and antique in form:—

Remember Florence Desmond,

WHO FORGOT NOT

HIS COUNTRY OR HIS GOD.

These be ye arms he wore.

His bones lie near his Saviour's grave,
Rest for his soul, all Desmonds, crave.

And of this worthy, as the legend ran, no more was known than this; that, indignant

at the gradual subjugation of his countrymen to the Anglo-Normans of the neighbouring isle, he had assumed the red cross and fallen in the Holy Land, though in what crusade, or in what era, romance and history alike fail to record. How the arms of the patriot champion had returned to his native land, was no less a matter of obscurity than the date or manner of his death; but he had been a bold man who had expressed a doubt about the authenticity of the arms, or the truth of the legend —at least in the presence of an O'Brien or a Desmond.

One thing was clear alone—that they hung there, religiously preserved, not so much a monument of the hereditary warrior's valour and renown, as a memento of his Celtic hatred for the rule of the stranger, with no faint inculcation of the charge, 'go thou and do likewise,' to his descendants of the most remote posterity.

This for the age and the country—perhaps I might say for the country in all ages.

But of the difference of female occupations at that day and in our time, the evidences were in no degree less obvious or decisive.

Among the instruments of music, and articles of *virtu* upon the table, many of which would make the brightest eyes glance with eager expectation in this nineteenth

century, lay a pair of embroidered hawking-gloves, fashioned for no hands—as the delicate size showed at a glance—but those of the soft Ellinor; a velvet pouch and belt, with the lures for the truant falcon, peeped from beneath some written music of the old notation, and the leaves of an open book were kept down in lieu of *presse papier*, by a small dagger with gold hilt and scabbard, rough with the toil of Cellini's chisel.

Then, in the chimmey corner, stood a light birding-piece, with a new-fangled wheel-lock, such as a lady's hand might balance; on the wall, near it, hung an ivory-inlaid cross-bow, with a quiver full of deer and bird bolts, besides a miscellaneous assortment of hawks' bells and jesses; silver-embossed curbs, and shell-mounted bridle-reins, and two or three pair of carved and gilded spurs, certainly suited for no larger heel than that of the fair mistress of the temple which I have entered, but with no sacrilegious tread.

Yet bend not your brows in scorn, gentle and delicate dames and damsels of this present day; nor with profane tongue stigmatise your sister beauty of a by-gone century as coarse or masculine, or rude, though she did, at times, suffer the winds of heaven to visit her unsoiled brow and glowing cheek in their wilder frolic—though

she feared not to put her courser to his speed—to launch her falcon on the track of the clanging heron, to speed her bird-shot after the flying partridge, or her bolt after the bounding roe; for she could bend her flexible throat and round her snowy arms over the harp as graciously as the most languid of you all; could warble notes as soft, and arch her blushing neck away in feigned reluctance from the very words she loved to listen, with an air of as artificial nature as if she had been the pupil of the most fashionable madame in the land. If they did break their fasts more heartily on the roast capon or the venison pasty, and, qualify their cups with Bourdeaux or malvoisie in lieu of chocolate or congo, their bodies were as delicately modelled, their complexions as pure—aye! and their souls as womanly and finely organised—as any in times older or more modern, unless the pencils of Vandyke and Leslie, the pens of Sidney Lovelace and Montrose, have all conspired to cheat us with a fiction.

But as they were in those days, they entered the bower, which, to their eyes, seemed courtly and decorous and refined, as perhaps to ours it would appear picturesque, chivalrous, and romantic; and well might it so appear, for in those days if they thought less of pictures, and talked less of chivalry,

and read less of romance, yet assuredly there was more of all the three crowded into every hour of their lives, in their costumes and customs, in their actions and devotions, in their opinions and observances—than into a whole life of ours.

They entered; and strange playmates for a delicate and youthful girl, a huge Irish greyhound of the old wolf-breed,—already becoming rare, and now all but extinct, reared itself slowly up from the deer-skin on which it had been resting in front of the glowing embers, shook itself, and yawned lazily; and then stalking forward with a calm majesty of demeanour, not inconsistent with its immense size—to greet his mistress; thrust his long shaggy muzzle into her white hand, and wagged his long feathered stern with genuine affection.

At the same time a beautiful little long-winged merlin—the smallest, and one of the most daring of the falcon tribe,—which had been dozing, without hood, bells, or jesses, on the top of a high-backed arm-chair, rose instantly, with a shrill quavering cry, upon its long arrowy pinions, and darting toward her with a speed of lightning, folded its wings as rapidly as if they had disappeared altogether, and sat motionless on her snowy shoulder, murmuring in a low tone of plea-

sure, and carefully averting its sharp talons from her skin.

'See, dear one,' said the young earl, pressing her hand with a half-melancholy smile, 'how all things seem to love and worship thee; how even the wildest of the fowls of the air, and the fiercest of the hounds of the chase, appear to change their natures, to lay aside their shyness and their savage moods to do homage to my lady. God grant that it may be so ever!' And he sighed slightly as he ceased from speaking.

Women are quick emphatically to judge, not by words alone, but by every tone and accent of the human voice, the feelings of the heart that inspires them, especially if it be the heart of a man, and a man whom they love.

And Dermot O'Brien had not spoken six words before Ellinor's soft eyes were fixed upon his face, half doubtfully, half sadly; but when he ended she said instantly:

'Something has occurred, Dermot, of much moment—I am sure of it; and you are greatly moved and distempered—else you would not speak so despondingly. Tell me at once; what is it?'

And patting the head of the tall greyhound, she bade him gently to lie down, removed the merlin from her shoulder to her wrist, on which he sate as contentedly

as if he had been on his own familiar perch, pruning his ruffled feathers. Then seating herself quietly, yet with an anxious expression on her features, in a great easy chair, she motioned O'Brien to a stool before her feet, and waited to hear his tale.

'I spoke from my heart, Ellinor,' replied the earl, 'when I said God grant that it may be so ever; and you are right, dear girl, when you believe that I am moved. I trust that I am moved without reason. But there is now near at hand—aye! under this very roof—a wilder and fiercer beast than hawk or hound — aye! than the very wolves which our ancestors were wont to hunt over the hills of yore. Do you mark me?'

'I know not what or whom you mean, O'Brien. This stranger who accompanied you home to-night?'

'It is no stranger, Ellinor. Would to God that he were a stranger. Think you a stranger could have moved me thus?'

'If a stranger, who?—speak, Dermot!'

'A kinsman—Hugh O'Neil!'

For a moment's space, the girl moved not, nor offered any answer; but she turned deathly pale, and a visible shudder ran through her lovely frame:

'Over God's forefend!' she answered at

last, and then added, 'but how?—how?—as a prisoner?'

'As as hostage, or— a guest!'

'A guest!' the beautiful woman interrupted him, her eyes actually lightening with indignation—'a guest! Hugh O'Neil a guest of the O'Brien! The traitor—the apostate of the loyal and the true!—or have you, too, become Parliamentarian, Puritan—how do they phrase it? You—you and Hugh O'Neil! I should have thought that the bones of your father would have burst their cerements — I should have thought those arms would have resounded on their stand, as his foot crossed the threshold!'

As she spoke the works, with a cheek again flushed and glowing, and a raised voice, the iron hand of the effigy, to which she pointed slipped from the pommel of the sword, and fell, with a heavy hollow clang against the giambeaux.

'Are your words prophetical?' cried the young man, starting, 'or is this trickery?'—But he lost not his presence of mind, or readiness of action for a moment; but snatching one of the wax candles, sprang up on a stool and proceeded to examine the panoply whence the ominous sound had proceeded; but there was nothing to be seen; though, as he commenced his scrutiny, the old hound, which had started up at the iron

clang, lifted his nose into the air, and uttered a low, long-drawn howl, such as the superstitious of mankind construe into a recognition of some disembodied presence.

'It was nothing, Dermot,' said the girl, shaking off her own emotion at the sight of his—'For shame! A soldier scared by a mere empty sound!—It was nothing—a mere accident!'

'A very strange one,' he replied, resuming his seat slowly. 'But everything is strange now-a-days! Here, in the mere killing of a stag, with all my hounds around me, and my men within call, my foot must fail me, and my sword fly my hand; and then, who of all mankind must spring out of the earth—where not an eye of man has seen him, these twice five years, as if the fiend himself had sent him, but this Hugh O'Neil, to preserve my life; when, fifty times rather had I lost it then owe thanks to him who, I believe it—God forgive me, almost as I believe in him—murthered my father!'

'Good heaven!—can this be so, Dermot?' exclaimed Ellinor, again turning deadly pale from the mere apprehension of her lover's peril. 'And did he save your life?'

'I would to heaven that I had lost it, rather!'

'Oh! say not so—say not so—Dermot!

God pardon you the word, and him, if it may be, some of his sins, for the deed.'

'I do say so, Eily,' answered the young earl mournfully.—'I do say so, notwithstanding; for I see not the end or object of his coming hither—unless it be ruin and misery to us all.'

'But you have not yet told me wherefore or how he came hither.'

'He asked it, nay insisted on it, as the guerdon for the saving of my life; and I could not refuse it; for he would be slain surely for a renegade by the first of our people whom he met withal—a fate which, how richly he might merit it soever, would scarce comport with my honour.'

'True, true. You could scarce do otherwise. But what makes he in Ireland at all?

'He boasts himself repentant—that is, a double traitor!—but I doubt him a spy, rather, and am almost—heaven forgive me when I shame my manhood to confess it—afraid of him.'

'There is no shame that the bravest of mankind should fear a serpent; and if ever there was such in the guise of man, such is Hugh O'Neil But tell me all,' she added, 'or how can I advise you?'

Then, in a few concise and clear sentences, he set before her all that had passed, not forgetting the intelligence which he had

brought, and his evident intention of doing all the service he could for the moment, to the king's cause, whatever might be his ulterior objects.

'But such an instrument!' was the first right-minded impulse of the high, noble-hearted girl,—'will not so base an instrument, even if he could be trusted, draw down dishonour, if not ruin, even upon a righteous cause?'

'I think so, Eily—in God's truth, I think so!'

'And my brother, and Florence, Dermot, what thinks he?'

'Even as I; and counsels that I hold him as a hostage, in all honour, but in durance, until to-morrow shall bring forth the truth or falsehood of his tidings. He has him in ward, even now.'

'Then are you better counselled than by a weak girl, such as I. But what fear you, or what harm can he work here in ward, if not in durance?'

'Past doubt, this intelligence is true, else had he not trusted himself here; and this proven true, we can no longer hold him in ward even. He must be either sent in honour forth, or dwell here in honour. Now, though this information he has brought can in truth avail us nothing—as without him we must have heard of it

ere long from Ormond—he will build much on it in support of his future usefulness; and of his own past villany, will weave arguments, right plausible why by his present villany—for I believe not in your traitor's or apostate's penitence, the less too that he is a canting hypocrite—why he can do good service for the king in future.'

'Still what fear?—who will believe or trust in this double traitor? Florence, you say, has his eyes open?'

'Had he and I our wills, uncurbed by scrupulous honour, he would swing at daybreak from the castle flag-staff; and I would send his head from a culverin into the garrison of Dublin, to tell them his espials.'

'You do not dread your mother, who has so deep cause to distrust, to detest him?—You do not fear me?'

'I do fear my mother, somewhat. I do fear not *you*, but *for* you, everything! I doubt not that he knows you are here—here within those walls—and that you chiefly drew him hither?'

'If you fear not *me*, fear *for* me nothing!' answered the spirited girl. 'The grandchild, daughter, sister of Florence Desmond fears not what man can do unto her. Fear not for me, O'Brien,' she said, smiling cheerfully, rather to cheer her lover than that she felt any joy herself. 'What better

guardian can I have than my good gallant Fingal here, who never leaves his mistress? —Or if I need a weapon, what better than this trusty steel,'—and with the word she raised the dagger from the book on which it lay—'which has once already saved an Irish girl's honour, and drank the blood of her foul assailant.'

'A frail weapon, Eily,' he said, taking her delicate fingers between his own, 'in so weak a hand as this. It would scarcely find a traitor's heart beneath a corslet of the Ironsides.'

'Then should it find an honest and a loyal heart beneath the velvet boddice of a lady! Still it should save my honour!'

'You are a brave girl, Ellinor,' he replied, gazing with passionate admiration upon her speaking lineaments, and into her bright eyes, kindled as they were, with high and glorious fire. 'God of his mercy grant that you never be so tried!—But it is not so that I fear for you.'

'How then, O'Brien?—Tell me—tell me.'

The priest, Ellinor, the priest!'

'His reverence!' she answered, pausing a moment, and again slightly shuddering. 'Dermot, I think you never loved Father Daly.'

'Never, Eily, indeed; nor he me.'

'Oh, you are wrong there!—you are wrong. He says he has loved you ever, and would have served you, but you would not from the beginning.'

'Tush! tush!—the truth is not in him'.

'The truth *not* in him?' said Ellinor, doubtfully, and almost reproachfully—'the truth not in Father Daly! Oh! Heaven forgive you, Dermot; you are sinful!'

'Aye, I know you believe in him, and love and fear him—fear him, perhaps, even more than you love or believe him. My mother fears him only and entirely, loving him not at all, and believing him thus far only—that he can lock or unlock for her the gates of Paradise.'

'And do you not believe *that*, Dermot?'

'No more than I believe that man can scale the crystal battlements of heaven, and storm the everlasting habitations of the blessed! No, Eily; I love not the priest, nor fear the man, nor believe his teachings; for he teaches always and ever that "Thou shalt do evil, in the hope that good may come of it;" and I believe that a damnable, and not a Christian doctrine. But I do fear his influence upon those whom I love —and when I think of them, I almost hate his arts, and almost tremble at his power.'

'Does he teach that, O'Brien?' asked the girl, gazing at her lover with wide eyes of

bewilderment and wonder, but never dreaming of doubting his spoken word.

'Hath he never taught it to thee?'

'Never! never!—else had I spurned both him and his teaching. "Do evil that good may come of it." Who should do that must claim the attributes of the Allwise; for many may see and know the present evil, but God alone can foreknow the consequence! Out on it! out on it!—does he teach this?'

'He would call thee a weak vessel,' replied Dermot, scornfully. 'Too weak for the strong meats, which are not made for babes or sucklings. But you have heard him teach this many times, Eily?'

'Never!—When?—How?'

'Have you not heard him hint, with dark inuendoes, that this very Hugh O'Neil, whom you well know he never would condemn, or give up as altogether outcast, even when condemned of the Church, might be still acting *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, in betraying his king for a time—in drawing his sword against his country—even in *seeming* to foreswear his God—that he might, in a word, be playing the traitor only in order again to betray those hereafter to whom he was then betraying others?'

'A—h!' cried the girl, abhorrently, with a long sharp inhalation of her breath,

rather than an articulate word, letting her arms fall down by her sides despondently—'A—h! Dermot!'

'You recollect, Ellinor?'

'I do! I do—it is true. Though I thought not of it before.'

'And now, when this O'Neil is reconciled to the Church—is ready to play the traitor in behalf of this king whose father he betrayed, will not the priest return to his old preaching?—will he not put all trust himself in his disciple?—will he not force all others to receive him, either by fear or by favour?'

'Alas! O'Brien!' exclaimed Ellinor now thoroughly alarmed, and unable to contradict the deductions which he drew from such premises—'But this O'Neil's story?'

'Not to me nor to Florence Desmond! He knows too well that we would have scourged him till his bones were bare with our dog-whips, had he but breathed such infamy to ears of ours. But he is wily, and he knows his man, and never failed since he was an urchin of ten years, to play upon the weaknesses of every one who crossed his path, for his own profit. He is as sure of the priest as the soaring eagle of the lambkin; although the serpent were the better simile; for the priest's wisdom surpasses far his innocence.'

'And will his reverence believe him?'

'Before he shall have told a tale. Hugh's subtle craft was ever kindred and congenial to the priest's astute wiliness; and he did not a little by his casuistry to lend it yet a keener edge. I tell you he will jump at the conclusion, or ere a word be spoken; and this man's double villany shall be accounted to him as merit, ere his defence be opened.'

'And thence what fear you?'

'Everything that is evil. The necessity of enduring this man, knowing him to be a villain, and believing him to be a spy; the necessity of having him ever near to us—privy to our councils—present in our camps—a participator in our battles—a partner in our fortunes; the peril of his betraying all and everything to Cromwell, and we foreseeing all, yet unable to parry anything! And above all, and worst of all, the agony—for it will be nothing less to me—of seing him daily at my board—of believing him to be the controller of yours, of my mother's destiny! By heaven! it drives me mad to think of it!'

'Of my destiny! Hugh O'Neil the controller of my destiny! Do you conceive it possible? Dermot O'Brien—I would die sooner fifty deaths—I had almost said die sooner, soul and body! Do you think

I have forgotten—forgotten his insolence, his violence, his crimes?—Never! I say—never! never!'

'You know not—you cannot tell. Even here, the powers of the Church are immense, and the artifices of the unworthy of her sons yet more boundless.'

'And you believe Father Daly capable——?'

'I think Father Daly,' he interrupted her, 'no true priest of our true and holy faith—as I believe the only true and holy—but an ambitious, daring, worldly minded, and unscrupulous bad man. Ambitious and unscrupulous, not perhaps for himself; but for whatever he may deem the advancement of the Church; and by advancement, he means secular interest and worldly power. I think him capable of sacrificing mine or my mother's life, or your honour—nay, his own brother's life, or his own sister's honour, to the winning of the stakes for which he plays!'

'And yet you consort with him—take counsel with him—and in some sort obey him.'

'Alas! my Ellinor—in this our hapless country, I must do so, or abandon at once king and country, principle and creed, to the Puritan invader.'

'But wherefore, Dermot?—in the name of heaven, wherefore?'

'Because in this most wretched and distracted land, our priesthood have become —as nowhere else—the demagogues, the leaders of the popular will in matters wholly secular and political. And neither I nor Ormond—not even great Tyrone himself in his day of glory, can stir one inch in opposition to their will, and hold so much even as our own vassals in subjection, much less lead on the men of Ireland at large to conflict with the foe. As they inflame, or hold back lukewarm, so will the people burn and rage, or fall away and fly. And of this be sure—he will take O'Neil's side, and magnify him if he can, even to making him a leader; because his knavish low-born craft may be made the tool of the priest's high towering and ambitious skill, where my blunt onwardness of purpose, and Florence Desmond's soul of honour, would mock at any indirection, although it were disguised by all Rome's deepest sophistry.'

"I see—I understand. See, perhaps, and understand more than you believe or expect. This is my counsel, Dermot, since you have sought it: let not the priest on any account speak with him to-night; but leave him in my brother's ward until his

truth be certain, or his falsehood without question. If the last, *you* will deal with him ; how, I desire not to think, nor be informed. I will forthwith and disclose all this—all your doubts—and all my fears—for I *do* fear now very much, O'Brien ; and for reasons which have come upon me, slowly, but certainly, while you have been speaking—to your mother. I think I can prevail with her, in no event to receive him at her board, or suffer him beneath the same roof with her. But be that as it may, mark and receive my vow, Dermot O'Brien.'

'What mean you, Eily?' cried the young man, half-alarmed by the eager and wild excitement of her manner, and the passion which trembled in every accent of her raised voice.—'Eily, my own dear girl, what mean you?

'Listen and hear,' she answered with a grave, sad smile ; and with the words, she kneeled down on the hearth-stone, and stretched out her arms toward the beautiful, calm face of the Madonna, which seemed to look down quiet, unmoved, and benignant, upon the dark and passionate agitation of this lovely child of earth. 'And you, Virgin Mother, dearest, and holiest, and best beloved : and ye, saints and angels, and thou, Heavenly Father of all those who are afflicted and oppressed, and turn to thee for

aid—hear, and receive, and ratify my vow; for in your presence, on the hearth-stone of my murthered uncle's hall, I swear, that never, by word or deed, by sign or thought, will I receive, or countenance, or admit to my presence, willingly, this man, this Hugh O'Neil, whom I believe his murtherer—that never, knowingly, and willingly, will I sit at the same board, or kneel at the same altar, break of the some bread, drink of the same cup, or breathe of the same air with him, so may ye help me at my utmost need, whom I have called to hear my vow! And if I fail of this, so may all they whom I most love eschew me, and more also. Amen! Amen! So be it!'

And as she spoke, she drew out the dagger which she had concealed in her bosom, and kissed the cross again and again fervently.

Then she arose to her feet with a serener aspect, and more composed demeanour, and taking the earl by the hand, said, in a low, soft whisper:

'Now, Dermot, are you satisfied? For if not, I swear to you, that when you ask me, with true cause for asking—and without cause you would not—whether by day or night, whether from the board or the altar—whether to the court or the camp—to the midnight wilderness or the beleaguered city,—to a foreign land or a native grave, undoubt-

ing and unquestioning, I will go with you. Your country—as the Hebrew maiden said—shall be my country, and your God shall be mine, for in life I know you will forget neither; and if the one should fall and the other forsake, at least we can die for them together. Now, Dermot, are you satisfied?'

'Angel!' he cried, 'angel! Now indeed you have made me brave—now you have made me strong. Hugh O'Neil, do your worst! Sir priest, work your wiliest! The daring of the one, the deceit of the other—I scorn and I defy you!—Farewell, Eily, dearest, bravest, best. Fare you well, for a little while. I go to the priest. Lose no time, I beseech you, but seek out my mother, and tell her all, all, everything. We will meet anon in the great hall. Till then, once more, farewell!'

And with the words, he turned and left the room with a bolder port and a heart far more at ease, than he had carried since his first meeting with his loathed and despised kinsman; but she, as soon as he was gone, exhausted by the very vehemence of her late emotion, and unsustained any longer by his exciting presence, sank back into her armed chair, covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER VI.

'Now broach ye a pipe of malvoisie,
Bring pasties of the doe.'

MARMION.

AGAIN and again the trumpets had sent their brazen summons to the guests in the Red Castle; yet, save the aged countess and her lovely niece, none were as yet assembled in the grand saloon.

And there, in high state, with liveried pages waiting at the doors at the lower end of the immense tapestried apartment, in strange contrast the one to the other, sat those two women, silent and alone, and both, as it would seem, oppressed by deep and anxious thought.

Had a painter been desirous of introducing into his noblest work the type of the most perfect majesty of womanhood in extreme age, and the ideal of female loveliness in its youthful prime, he could not have done so with more complete effect than by copying

those ladies as they sate there, beneath the crimson canopy, upon the elevated dais at the upper end of the saloon, as if expecting to receive the homage of a glittering court.

The elder lady, not only as the wife and mother of one of the proudest races in the island, but as in her own line and person the descendant and direct heiress of one of the traditionary kings of Erin, was perhaps the haughtiest woman in the kingdom ; yet was her haughtiness rather mental than personal—rather ideal and imaginary than practical or real. Her bearing and demeanour were framed and regulated upon a purely fanciful model ; and she was constantly representing to her own inner self, her wrongs, her sufferings, and her sorrows, as a dispossessed and discrowned sovereign, so was she continually considering and devising how, when she should be brought into contact with the usurping majesty of England, or his viceroy, she should best assert her dignity, and display her contempt of so brief a line, and ill-founded a succession.

It must not be supposed, however, that she had the slightest idea of ever asserting, or even the desire to assert, a dignity which her good sense assured her had departed not only from her house, but from her people for ever. The stateliness of bearing

and maintenance of personal grandeur, was but a tribute, which she thought it necessary to pay to the hereditary splendour of her race—and was so largely mixed with a sort of subdued mournfulness and serene depression of spirits, that they were thereby deprived of all that would otherwise have been both ludicrous and absurd. As it was, the most irrepressible of laughers could have discovered nothing at which to smile in the ancestral pride of that aged lady, even if she did sit beneath a royal canopy, and did exact service of the most profound humility, and upon the bended knee. The rather that the qualities of her mind and her personal appearance were alike adapted to the station which she asserted; and that her presence was such as could not fail to impress a stranger with something not far removed from awe; although her graciousness to her dependants, and affection for her children, were maternally benevolent, and fond, even to tenderness.

She was extremely old—far older than the ordinary term to which human life is protracted even at the utmost; and it seemed strange that one so aged should be the mother of a youth still in the first prime and power of mature manhood.—But he was her last-born son, the child of her almost decrepitude, as of her sorrow; for

she had borne six goodly sons before him to the great earl, his father; and, each after each, she had seen them perish almost before her eyes, by violent and untimely deaths —four on the battle-field, one on the stormy ocean, and one—too common a fate, alas! in those days—upon the blood-stained scaffold; so that they had despaired, at one time, of leaving any scion to uphold the honours of their race. But in her old age she had borne this last and noblest of her boys, Dermot O'Brien, to succeed to his father's dignities, when he, like all his race, fell for his loyalty to his king, and his faith in the God of his fathers, by the unsparing steel of the Puritan usurpers of all privilege, all prerogative, all liberty.

In person, the countess was taller than the utmost height to which women attain—overlooking all her attendants, and even her fair niece, almost by a head and shoulders; and, indeed, exceeding almost all the men of her clan in stature, with the exception of her son and some of his kindred chieftains, who were all proportioned, more or less, after the fashion of the sons of Arak. What rendered her height more conspicuous, was, that in despite the depredations of years, and the remarkable emaciation of her frame, she was still as erect and unbending as one of

the pine-trees on her native mountains of Slievh-Buy. Years, indeed, seemed to have glided by her, as do the keenest blasts of heaven by those giants of the green-wood, shearing away the graces of their foliage, and diminishing the grandeur of their umbrage, yet leaving them erect in unbended hardihood, and still proof against all, save steel or fire, or an earthquake's shock, to move them.

Her hair was as white as the untrodden snow on the loftiest mountain-peak, and as bright, as glossy, and as glittering, as when in her virgin beauty it shamed the wing of the wild raven by its rich metallic lustre. It was luxuriant, too, as in her seventeenth summer, and was still braided on either side her broad, pale, lofty forehead, in plaited bands, and raised upon her crown in a tall, elaborate diadem of tresses, undisguised and undisfigured by the hideous hair-powder with which it was the mode of that day to change even the bright locks of youth and beauty.

Her lineaments were all high and noble; and it was evident that even when she was at her freshest and fairest, nobility and dignity, rather than softness or tenderness, must have been the character of her countenance; for, although all her features were well formed and handsome, they were

all of that style which belongs to the keenest and most aquiline contour. Her brows were straight, and must have been of old strongly defined—though now, like her hair, they were silver white; and the eyes, which looked from beneath these, large, open, and undazzled as the eagle's, had a clear, penetrating glance, which seemed to pry into the very soul of whom she would scrutinise; and at such time, their lustre was intense, and almost painful to the beholder. The nose, though not prominent, was high and curved, with large, thorough-bred nostrils, which she had a habit of expanding, as if she would snuff the air, when chafed or irritated by anything which she deemed little or unworthy. Her mouth was well shaped, although the lips were now thin and pale, and expressing rather firmness and resolution of character, than any more womanly feeling in their ordinary aspect; although at times, a smile of ineffable benevolence and softness would play over it, and light up all the face into loving warmth and lustre, even as a sunset gleam will at times irradiate a landscape, which all day long has been grave and lowering.

The Countess O'Brien—for so she preferred to be styled, regarding the name as older and more noble than the title which

she bore of right—was clad suitably to her age, her sorrows, and her rank, in a plain robe of heavy black silk, covering her person from the collar-bone to the wrists, and to the clasps of her high-heeled shoes, perfectly plain and straight cut, and gathered in about her waist by a black velvet cincture with a jet buckle. A mantelet of black velvet, sitting closely to her shape, fell down to the ground, and extended in a train of several yards in length behind, which was borne, when she was in motion, by two handsome girls, who were now seated on low stools at the foot of the dais—and whose fresh plump prettiness offered a striking, though of course unintentional, contrast to the grey-haired and attenuated majesty of their mistress.

She had no ornament of any kind upon her person, unless the diamond buckles in her shoes, which were then worn by every person of any distinction, can be called such, or her husband's signet-ring, which, notwithstanding her son's majority, she still bore as a thumb-ring; nor did she need any such—if the meaning of these things be to signify and render evident personal eminence and dictinction—for if she had been clad in the coarsest servile weeds, her na-

tive aristocracy of beating must have proved at once her title to hereditary honour.

Ellinor Desmond, as she sat beside her aged relative, on a seat something less elevated than her chair of dignity, was such as I have before described her, the fairest of a country and a race distinguished at all times by a high style of female loveliness. She had just reached that period of life when the young female has attained the fullest and most perfect development of every feminine charm; when every beauty of form, feature, and expression, is in its flower and flush of luxuriant ripeness; and before one of the graces, the delicacies, or the fresh softness of youth have yielded to the touch of Time, or grown hard through contact with the world's stern realities.

She, too, was attired according to her age and station, but with a degree of taste peculiarly her own, and with more reference to the fine models of costume afforded by the portraits of the fair and noble of the middle ages, than to the frightful fashions of puritanical austerity, or the new modes of French frippery, which were becoming current latterly among the families of the cavaliers.

Her long robe—admirably fitted to the soft, undulating outlines of a shape which had never been disfigured by the pressure

of the rigid whalebone which rendered the corsage of a lady of those days scarcely less iron than the corslet of her lord—was of rich emerald-coloured velvet, just edged with a narrow stripe of gold, and gathered round her slender waist by a golden cincture. Her fine falling shoulders and swan-like neck were bare in their dazzling beauty, as were her full round arms almost to the shoulders; and she wore upon her head a graceful wreath of the dark-leaved Irish ivy, the berries of which, having been gilded, glittered in fine contrast to the black silken masses of her luxuriant ringlets.

Her dress, her attitude, and the half-mournful, half-enthusiastic expression which hovered like a cloud over her beautiful features, would have suited the poet's ideal of the wild, melancholy muse of unhappy Erin. Nor could any one, how little liable soever to fanciful or romantic imaginations, have failed to feel his fancy stirred to something of a higher flight, as his eye dwelt on that surpassing creature.

She had already possessed the countess of all the occurrences of the evening, as of the wishes and the apprehensions of her lover; and had for the time succeeded in kindling the proud spirit of their race in that aged bosom, and disposing her to the

assertion of something more than mere dignity of bearing against the anticipated assumption of the priest. A thousand recollections had flashed upon the mind of the countess at the high words and energetic counsels of her niece ; and she had responded to them with a burst of truly national eloquence, bordering almost upon invective, as the idea was forced upon her that the dignity of her house would be insulted by having a renegade, a traitor to his country, and an especial enemy of her race thrust upon her as a guest, even much more as a confident and friend, by anything of priestly interference. And for a while, her wonted reverence for the Church, and her personal respect—not all unmixed with fear—for her confessor, yielded to the tide of lacerated and indignant feeling which overflowed her heart at the bare thought of being urged to receive courteously one whom she had ever regarded as the betrayer and assassin of her lost lord. By degrees, however, anxiety and apprehension began to take the place of wrath; and it were difficult to say whether she were more resolved to refuse any terms to the recreant Hugh O'Neil, or doubtful how she should carry out her resolves.

Ellinor also was filled with gloomy apprehensions ; she knew the temper and feelings

of her aged relative, even to their inmost secrets; and this knowledge it was that filled her with anxiety; she was aware that her nature partook much in one respect the quality of the flint':

> 'Which, much enforced, sheweth a hasty spark,
> And straight is cold again—'

that the hotter the stages of her first ire, the quicker it subsided into gloom and coldness; and above all, she dreaded, and with reason, the strange and stern interest which the priest Daly had gained over her spirit, otherwise so haughty and indomitable.

Such were the causes of the deep thought and anxious gloom in which both the noble ladies were enveloped, when, at the third sounding of the trumpets, the great doors at the lower end of the saloon were thrown open, and the young earl entered, followed by his paternal cousins, Con and Ulick, and having the priest Daly walking at his right hand in composed and apparently serene humility. Many other guests, gentlemen, and kinsmen, of the house, entered in order, each according to his nearness in blood to the head of the clan, until at least twenty persons were assembled—as fair a company as ever graced the court of a crowned sovereign, so far as stateliness of bearing, and completeness of manly beauty.

The young earl—who was now richly dressed in accordance with his rank—walked into the room with a rapid and irregular step, very unlike his ordinary gait, which was remarkably firm and even, as is for the most part the case with men of great characters and fixed resolution. There was a nervous quivering, too, of his nether lip, and a bright, hectic-looking spot of burning crimson on either of his cheek-bones, while all the rest of his face was almost unnaturally pallid.

His right hand was employed constantly, but it would seem unconsciously, in playing with the hilt of the highly ornamentad dagger which occupied the left side of his girdle; and by each, the least, of these signs, Ellinor, who had raised her eyes anxiously on her lover's entrance, and perhaps, saw for the moment nothing but his high lineaments, read, at the first glance, that he had been singularly chafed and irritated during his prolonged interview with Father Daly.

Thence her eye wandered to the priest, and although the man was to most eyes inscrutable, him too she perused almost to his inmost soul, discovering secret thoughts and sentiments kept down by an iron will, and subdued by a long course of mental discipline—albeit herself so young in years

and so unaccustomed to the great world, which would probably have escaped the observation, or baffled the judgment, of the wiser and more worldly spirits.

For, in truth, the human heart has its instincts, is endowed with strange and mysterious powers, with passions of wonder-working efficacy, which seem sometimes to create a sudden, and as it were, self-born capacity of intuition, which stands the owner instead of experience, wisdom, logical conclusion, and sets the veriest child of nature—for the moment—above the subtlest disputant, the most thoughtful investigator of human actions, and their source—the human soul.

The strongest and most active of these passions is love.—And almost miraculous are at times the powers of perception, of comprehension, and almost of prophecy which it pours like a flash of lightning into a night of blackness, over the earnest and unselfish heart, informing what was but now Cimmerian gloom with clearness as of the sun at noon.

And thus it was now with Ellinor Desmond. She too, like all around her, had been more or less subdued to the remorseless—and as it seemed—inevitable rule of his serene and unostentatious, yet all-controlling despotism.

She too had regarded him as a man apart from all things—almost indeed, above them; as one whose sway over her mind it were well nigh impious to dispute—into whose motives it were wholly useless so enquire.

But now, at once, and as it were, by a single glance, she read every present thought of his dark soul, and could have almost presaged his future line of action.

He was a tall, spare man, with an exceedingly erect carriage, so far as to the shoulders; but his neck was bowed and stooping, so that his face was for the most part nearly invisible to any one standing in front of him—especially if he were conversing on any topics of unusual interest—at which times his eyes would be so completely covered by his drooping lids, that it was difficult to believe that he did not resort to this posture from a desire to prevent his thoughts from being deciphered through the expression of his face. At other times—especially when he knew himself to be unobserved—he would gaze with a sharp, marking, and inquisitive look, into the countenances of all around him, wandering with the speed of intuition from face to face, and passing onward so rapidly as to avoid detection. But if, by any chance, the face of the observed was lifted suddenly, so as to meet his glance, it fell

instantly, without a sign of embarrassment or confusion, leaving the man—so far as all outward expression was concerned— a blank inscrutable; and at such times, he would usually begin to discourse upon some fascinating abstract topic, with an eloquence of language, a silvery sweetness of tongue, and a serene unconsciousness of manner, which might have imposed upon the shrewdest-minded.

In dress and demeanour, he exhibited nothing of the clerical profession. At that period, indeed, it would have been unsafe to do so; and although Ignatius Daly was made of stuff that would shrink from any peril incurred for the real advancement of his order, in which was wrapped up all the selfishness, all the ambition, all the egotistical pride of his own wily and aspiring nature, still less was he of that temper which would rashly front the edge of the persecutor's two-edged edicts, or seek the barren honours of unnecessary martyrdom.

As was frequently the case with the more trusted members of the order of Jesus, even in ordinary times, when concealment of his rank or profession might tend *ad majorem Dei Gloriam*, as the phrase ran, Father Ignatius had a general dispensation to wear the garments and the

weapons of a layman; and it was well-known that he had often wielded the latter with the skill and prowess of a soldier, *literally* of the church militant, rendered singularly formidable by the coldness of his impassive temperament.

Such was the man who glided into the room with the noiseless and stealthy step of the prowling panther, shooting keen glances true to the mark as so many winged arrows, from beneath the long, thick lashes of his downcast lids; observing everything which he cared to notice; while to a casual spectator, it would have seemed that he scarce cared to note how many persons, much less who were present in the saloon.

There was, evidently, a feeling of uneasiness and wonder pervading the bosoms of all the young gentlemen in the young earl's train; for all knew that a stranger had been brought in with the hunting party under strange circumstances, and that he was now in confinement, as a sort of honourable prisoner, under the ward of Colonel Desmond. None, however, knew—with the exception of the gentlemen and vassals who had composed the hunting party—who this stranger was; and as these either evaded answering any questions put to them, or replied openly,

that they were forbidden to speak out, curiosity and suspicion were both vehemently excited, to which not a little touch of fear was added by the character and temper of the times. The earl's interview with the priest had not passed unmarked, and it had transpired, too, that warm words had been used, and that the O'Brien was greatly moved.

No one, however, dared to ask a question, nor was a word spoken, until the young earl reached the foot of the dais, when he addressed his mother in tones indicative of the deepest respect, and with a bow so deep, as is usually rendered to strangers only.

'I pray your ladyship to pardon me,' he said, 'for keeping you thus awaiting in what must have seemed so unmannerly a way. But strange things have befallen us to-day, and it was necessary that we should take counsel on them promptly.'

'I pardon you, my son,' replied the aged lady, who had risen to her feet as the guests entered the saloon, and advanced to the edge of the low steps leading into the body of the apartment, where the two attendant maidens extended her train, and disposed themselves to bear it, as she should move forward. 'I pardon you right willingly; and that the rather that you have never

failed of respect in the right sort before, and that I therefore doubt not your having a sufficient cause, which you have communicated doubtless to our excellent counsellor, and good friend, Father Daly; although, I wonder somewhat that my son should have sought any counsellor before his mother.'

'I pray you pardon me again,' answered the earl, speaking more quickly than before; 'but I have not sought any counsel of the reverend and pious father—seeing that the matter partook not of a ghostly nature, nor needed divine admonitions—but called for worldly knowledge, and something, perchance, of military wisdom. I conferred with him merely to let him know my will touching the course of conduct to be observed by all beneath my roof, to a most strange and unexpected inmate.'

'A most unwelcome inmate, you would say, my son,' interposed the aged lady, with a deep frown depressing her long, straight brows, although it did not alter the grave tranquillity of her features.

'A *most* unwelcome inmate,' he returned, with grave emphasis.

'And yet he saved your life, my son,' replied the priest, or ere the countess could frame her answer; and he spoke in an accent of the most perfect serenity, and in a voice that rang like a soft silvery trumpet.

'Saved your life—perchance sent especially unto that end. Have you considered what it is to call one sent of the Most High, unwelcome?'

'I have heard say,' answered the earl quickly, and even, sharply, 'that HE of whom we may not judge, has, at times, in His wisdom, sent evil spirits and false prophets to whom He would try. Would you call these welcome, right reverend sir, and father?'

'I would not judge, my son,' returned the priest; 'at least until I knew the ends which not only prove, but justify the means.'

'Nor I,' answered the earl; 'and therefore, judging of the present from past ends, him I do call unwelcome.'

'Indeed, most unwelcome,' said the countess, so sternly and decidedly, that even the priest deemed it advisable to say no farther at that time. 'But more of this hereafter. Supper awaits us, and our meat will be cold if we tarry longer. But where is our honoured guest, and trusty cousin, Florence Desmond?—where is your brother, Ellinor?'

'Colonel Desmond has of his love for us consented, mother, to take upon himself a most unpleasant task—to be the entertainer, namely, of this inmate, holding him in such honourable ward as I dare only for the pre-

sent impose upon him, and suffering no one to converse with him, let what may be the colour of his coat.'

And, as he spoke, he glanced his eye slightly towards the black velvet *just au corps* of the priest, who adhered to the colour, if not to the cut, of his order.

'I knew not,' interrupted Con O'Brien shortly, 'that there was any coat but of one colour under this honourable roof. Methinks, if there be, it will not be long until a score or two of rapiers find out of what stuff it is made.'

'Many turn their coats, sometimes, Con,' answered the priest, with slow, stern emphasis.

'And some wear black coats, our dear son would say,' the priest again interposed, 'who have not turned, nor are like to turn them. Is it not so, my lord?'

'Even so, sir,' answered O'Brien. 'It is *my will* that no man, whether clerical or lay—whether citizen or soldier—whether for the king or the Parliament, shall see that personage to-night—no, not if it were *in extremis*, even to make his last confession.'

'There is little fear, my son, that such emergency shall arise—though if it should, I think you would scarce adhere to so impious a resolve——'

'But I should—strictly, to the letter,'

answered the earl steadily, while the priest went on, as if he had not heard or noted the interruption—'unless, indeed, Colonel Florence Desmond have it in part of his trust to slay this *unwelcome* inmate.'

'To do murder under trust—under the O'Brien's trust!' exclaimed the O'Brien fiercely, with his hand upon his hilt—'Priest, it is well for you that you are a priest; for otherwise——'

'You should not shame your noble sword upon him!' cried Ellinor, taking a quick step forward—her beautiful cheeks blazing, and her eyes flashing with fiery indignation. 'He who slanders the absent, the noble, and the good, sheltering himself behind the dark shield of Church privilege, is thrice a coward, and ten times a knave, were he a thousand times a priest.'

'Ellinor, Ellinor!' exclaimed the aged countess, raising her long, thin arm—'peace, peace! You have forgotten. Is this maidenly?'

'As maidenly as that is priestly,' she made answer. 'And if I have forgotten, what has he done—daring to hint an assassin's stain upon a soldier, before a sister's face? Has not he forgotten?'

'Most grossly—most disgracefully,' answered the earl; 'forgotten himself as a

churchman, a gentleman, and a man—and that to a lady.'

The priest raised his eyes, for the first time, fully, and looked the countess in the face directly, with a strange meaning gaze. That piercing, fascinating gaze was at once in itself a question and a command.

It spoke almost as audibly, as with articulate words: 'And dost thou too dare to brave me?' It commanded with imperious power: 'Silence this impuny opposition!'

But for once the question was unanswered—the command disobeyed; and, as he saw that his will was for the first time frustrated, and that his power had departed, assuming an air of the deepest humility, almost of contrition, and smiting his breast with his hand, he exclaimed in a low, quiet tone:—

'Woe is me! woe is me! When the flocks go astray, surely the leader of the flock is not guiltless. How I have sinned, I know not; but of a very truth my sin is flagrant before heaven! Farewell, my children—fare ye well. My mission here is ended. When confidence is gone away, utility must needs go likewise. Heaven's blessing be about this house, and upon its dwellers, now and evermore. Fare ye well—fare ye well, for ever!'

And he turned on his heel slowly and re-

luctantly, expecting in his own heart to be recalled and humbly sued for pardon, and strode with a firm and stately step across the echoing floor, until he reached the large arched doorway, under which he paused and looked back upon that silent and astounded group with an air and gesture which, though it was ill-dissembled for a courteous, sad farewell, was in reality a stern, prophetic menace.

Deeply religious, however, as is the genius of the Irish people, and inclined to the profoundest reverence for the priestly character of office, the offence which he had offered to the head of that great and noble clan, whereof all his auditors were members, was so flagrant, and his interposition in favour of one so odious as Hugh O'Neil so strange and suspicious, that there was but one feeling of outraged dignity and injured patriotism among the company; and he was suffered to depart without a word or a salutation, much less an offer to recal him.

There was a moment's pause after he had left the saloon—a short, breathless interval before any one spoke or stirred; but when he had departed, it was evident that the hearts of all beat more lightly in their bosoms, and that a cause of restraint at least, or if not of apprehension, had been

removed by the secession of the dark church-man.

But collecting himself in an instant, and thoroughly reassured by the demeanour of his subordinate chieftains, if he had ever doubted how they would incline between his patriarchal authority and the discipline of the church, the young earl advanced with much respect to the foot of the dais, and taking his mother's hand in his own, conducted her with as much observance of decorum, as if she had been a crowned head, from the state saloon—one of his cousins tendering the like service to the fair Ellinor, and all the gentlemen of his train following his steps according to their rank, followed in their turn by a long retinue of feudal servitors, seneschals, stewards, esquires, and pages, towards the grand hall, in which the evening meal awaited them.

It was a vast apartment, floored, wainscoted and ceiled with black bog oak, rarely sculptured, and polished, till it shone in the light of the numerous waxen torches, blazing in silver candlesticks and sconces, like one continuous mirror. The great board, in the shape of the letter T, the upper or transverse limb of which was appropriated to the members of the proper family alone, extended down two-thirds the length of the hall, covered with snow-white linen, for the

manufacture of which Ireland was beginning already to be noted, and laid with plates and dishes of pewter, burnished as bright as silver, and intermixed with flaggons, cups, and tankards of the purer metal. The upper board, which was occupied by the earl and the aged countess, in their chairs of state, by the fair Ellinor Desmond and the two noble youths, Con and Ulick O'Brien, beside whom stood a vacant chair for the absent Florence, was spread with crimson velvet, and laid with a service of massive silver. The salt-cellar, a rare and splendid piece of plate, and all the drinking-cups and vessels being either of pure gold, or so richly gilded as not readily to be distinguished from it.

The feast was sumptuous and delicate, according to the notions of that day, although it was composed of dainties far too solid and substantial to meet our ideas of a supper. There were huge tureens steaming with strong venison soup, vast barons of beef, haunches and chines of the fallow deer, pasties of red deer venison, looking like fortalices of pastry, wild fowl, roebucks and cygnets roasted whole; and to complete the table, the latest remnant of the feudal ages, a peacock, with his train replaced in all its glory; its crest and claws superbly gilded, occupying the post of honour.

And all this splendid show of edibles was accompanied by a display of potables in no degree less masculine and potent.—Tankards of ale and mead, flaggons of malvoïsie and Bourdeaux wines, spiced wassail bowels of hippocras and pigment, and great horns of the national beverage, the fiery usquebaugh, circulated unchecked and unreproved by the presence of the ladies.

Still, in spite of the good cheer, and the hospitable efforts of O'Brien, the mirth of the meeting was destroyed. A cloud hung over the spirits of all—as well of those who were conscious of the cause of the strange events of that night, as of those who had been merely the ignorant spectators of the scene; nor was the spirit or harmonious feeling of the company at all increased by the entrance, as soon as the meats were removed, and the ladies had withdrawn, of the old seneschal, completely armed from gorget to spur, in an antique suite of plate armour, bearing the keys of the three different gate-houses upon a salver, which he deposited on the board at his lord's right hand; after which he stood with his right hand resting upon the hilt of his great war-sword as if awaiting orders.

Had a bomb-shell fallen unexpected into the midst of that fair company, it could hardly have created greater confusion or

astonishment than did that singular and warlike apparition at a moment when, save two or three of the immediate kinsmen of the earl, no one anticipated aught of danger, or had conceived the possibility of any interruption of the evening's revel.

'Ha! Torlogh,' said the O'Brien, calmly, 'the wards are all made sure, then?'

'As sure as iron bolts and stone walls can make them, noble earl,' replied the old man quickly. 'I locked the gates with mine own hand, and saw each portcullis lowered. Trusty men are on the watch in all the towers, and for this night all is safe, I can assure you.'

'I take your assurance, Torlogh,' said the earl, 'as if I myself had seen it done. It remains, however, to post some one on the eagle tower, who will not close his eyes in sleep, that he watch the beacon upon Claude-boy, and rouse the castle if it blaze ere daybreak.'

'That post is mine, my lord,' the old man answered in a calm, low voice, but with an air of fixed determination. 'Mine *now* as it was in the days of yore, under the great earl, your father.'

'You do not spare yourself, old Torlogh. There be younger men enow who may watch, while you take the rest that is needful to your years.'

'The cause, the cause, lord earl, will spare none of its upholders; and if the leaders spare themselves, how shall the kernes and vassals do their duty?'

'Well said! well said! Such is the true spirit. Our God and our king cannot spare us, and Heaven's malison on him!' exclaimed O'Brien, starting to his feet, 'who seeks to spare himself, whether for fear or favour!'

'Heaven's malison upon him!' shouted a hundred voices; for as the earl arose, each gentleman down the long board sprang to his feet simultaneously, perceiving now, for the first time, that the hour for action had arrived; and as they arose, their rapiers flashed from their sheaths in the bright candle-light, and they re-echoed, as a single man, the high words of their chieftain; while kindling at the fire which blazed in the bosoms of their nobles, the squires and servitors caught up the word and gave it stirring utterance, until the tapestries trembled, and the torches winked and quivered in the commotion of the atmosphere caused by that sudden clamour.

From the hall through the vestibule it passed, and into the court-yard, and to the outer walls, the bastion, the dungeon-keep, until the whole of the old fortalice was

wakened with its thousand echoes into loud and unexpected life.

A proud eye did the young earl cast around him over that high and gallant company, whose every heart, as he perceived at a single glance, panted responsive to his own. He unhooked his long broadsword from his belt, scabbard and all, and unsheathing the weapon with a slow, but steady gesture, cast the sheath over his shoulder high into the air.

Not a breath was drawn, not a plume fluttered, not a cloak rustled—so deep was the anxious silence of that moment; the empty sheath fell with a ringing rattle upon the oaken floor; and as the echoes sank, the clear voice of O'Brien filled the apartment as if with a real presence—so clear, so full, so puissant was its volume.

'You have done well!' he said. 'Gentlemen, fellow-soldiers, friends! you have done well to unsheath the mortal sword. You had done better to cast away the scabbard likewise; for never must those swords go up again until the cause for which we fight is conquered; the cause of our God, our country, and our king; and if the news which I have heard this day prove true, as well I fear it will, every sword, every arm, every heart in Ireland will be right dearly needed. Ormond is routed, friends, by the

base roundhead Jones; the siege of Dublin is already raised, the arch fiend Cromwell is himself upon the seas—perhaps upon the shores of Ireland already. To arms, then, every manly hand! To arms, every loyal heart! To arms, one and all, even of who are neither brave nor loyal, if he would not be seized in his own house cowardly, and butchered like a mere sheep in the shambles. Before the sun shall arise in the east, the truth, the whole truth, shall be known; and if it be as I deem it is, his first rays shall see the O'Brien's banner on the breeze, the O'Brien's foot in the stirrup, the O'Brien's weapon in his hand. Who will not side with the O'Brien?'

Had the call been to the banquet or the dance, to the tourney or the chase, some might have lagged reluctant—some might have turned aside, indolent or heedless.

It was to the battle!—to the battle, against puritan hypocrisy—against democratical oppression—against fanatical intolerance; and every man sought to be foremost—the very boys—the pages, scarcely children in their years, stood forth at once, eager to be the champions of the cause—the noblest cause for which the sword was ever drawn—for that cause was divine, was threefold—religion, patriotism,

loyalty; and who should dare oppose them?

Again, from battlement to dungeon, the castle rang with the exulting cheers of the true-born, the loyal Irish cavaliers; and in the courts without, the trumpeters struck up unbidden; and kettle-drum and bugle blast pealed far and wide through the summer night, sending abroad the stirring strains of the Island melody, "Erin Mavourneen, Erin go bragh," mixed with the wild hurrah and the high name of England's loved and lawful king.

Long, long may those notes sound together—and shame on him who would divide them—Ireland for ever, and God save the king!

CHAPTER VII.

"The sentinel on Whitehall gate
Looked forth into the night,
And saw o'erhanging Richmond Hill
The streak of blood-red light.
Then bugle's note and cannon's roar
The death-like silence broke."

MACAULEY.

It was an hour past midnight, and the castle, with all its inmates, had, as it seemed, long been steeped in silence and in slumber. Not a sound had been heard for several hours but the clank of the sentinels passing at intervals and repassing over the echoing pavements. But in a lofty window near the top of the loftiest turrets a lamp was burning clearly and steadily, though now and then some large dark body would pass between it and the casement, intercepting its lustrous rays for a moment, and then leaving them vivid and uninterrupted as before.

There was, then, one watcher, at least,

within those ancient walls other than the mere guards of the night.

The window, whence that light streamed so far into the night, should perhaps rather have been called a loop, so small and narrow were it dimensions, although it was provided with diamond-shaped panes of glass, set in a heavy leaden frame; but it belonged to a neat and pleasant antechamber, though of small dimensions, opening by one door upon the winding stone staircase, and by the other into a large and handsome apartment, which had no other visible entrance than through that antechamber.

One person was alone the tenant of that antechamber, and that one was Florence Desmond.

A bright wood fire was blazing cheerfully on the hearth, while on the circular table before it stood a large lamp with three burners, towering above several well-filled flaggons and two or three large Venice glasses, which by their clear transparency seemed to indicate that the contents of the flaggons had met with little favour from the young colonel.

Beside the glasses, and in front of a comfortable arm-chair which seemed to have been but recently thrust back from its vicinity to the table, lay a volume of Shak-

speare open at that fine passage in the play of Trolius and Cressida, beginning with the lines :—

> 'Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
> A great-sized monster of ingratitude——'

over which Florence Desmond appeared to have been poring very lately, and perhaps to have arisen only on some slight suspicion, or anticipation of alarm; for his sheathed rapier, a long straight cross-hilted Toledo blade, with an ebony hilt and black leather scabbard, lay close to the volume, accompanied by a brace of heavy horse-pistols. But Desmond himself stood erect, midway between the table and the door, which led into the inner chamber, in an attitude of the deepest and most interested attention.

Twice or three times before, during the course of that night in which he had kept lonely ward over the much-suspected hostage, he had imagined that the murmur of suppressed voices came to his ear indistinctly from within, as of some one conversing with the person. But each time, when he reflected that these apartments had been selected for the very purpose to which they were now applied by the O'Brien, in consequence of the fact they had no communication with

the other parts of the castle, except by the antechamber in which he sat himself and the staircase leading from it, he had banished the idea with a smile at his own foolish fancy, and returned to his volume, satisfied that the lord of the castle must be acquainted with the secrets of his own dwelling.

This fourth time, however, the conviction was so strong upon his mind that the faint murmur which he heard in that direction was neither, as he had before striven to believe, the sigh of the wind among the distant tree-tops, or the chiding of the water-course five hundred feet below, but the blended tones of the human voice—that he at length pushed back his chair noiselessly, arose to his feet, and throwing off the velvet slippers which he had substituted for his ponderous riding-boots, approached the door of the inner room with a step that gave out no sound on the soft rushes with which the floor was bestrewn.

The nearer he approached, the more perfectly he was convinced that his impression was correct; and he began to regret bitterly that he had not acted on his first impulse. But he was not a man to regret idly, when there was room for present action. With his hand on his dagger's hilt, he made one spring forward, and his grasp

was on the latch of the door. It turned, yet the door yielded not, having been fastened from within by some suddenly-devised method; for Desmond well knew that it had no bolt nor lock on the inner side.

It resisted for one second only. The next, heavy oak as it was, it flew open, as the cave door in the Arabian tales at the word 'sesame,' before the impetus of Desmond's foot.

As the strong door gave way, he could have sworn that a light flashed for one second upon his eye; but at the same instant his quick ear, strangely sharpened by suspicion of treachery, detected, through the clatter of the broken latch and the clang of the flapping door, the sound of something heavy falling—then all was darkness, and, unless it were a dull, uncertain rustling, all was silence also.

The next moment the strong, unpleasant odour of a suddenly extinguished lamp became palpably sensible; and then, ere he had time to reach his own lamp, a slight creak, as of stiff hinges moving, and a flap, as if of waving tapestry, followed.

Still, from within that dark chamber, into which there fell but an uncertain glimmer from Desmond's lamp, standing within the angle of the chimney-corner, there came no positive sound, no angry outcry at the ir-

ruption, which had been accompanied with enough of noise to awaken the seven sleepers.

Had O'Neil then escaped? That thought was almost madness.

He then returned to the antechamber, snatched the lamp with his left, and a horse-pistol with his right hand, in less time than it takes to record it, and was rushing back into the prisoner's chamber, when a sight met his eye that arrested him, and fixed him where he stood, motionless as a marble statue.

What was it that so blanched his cheek, and dimmed his flashing eye? For his eye was dimmed, and his cheek blanched on the instant.

Far off, far off on the very verge of the horizon, where by daylight the keenest eye could not have discerned the blue line of the low hills which there bounded the landscape from the blue sky above them, there glimmered a faint speck of fire, scarce brighter than the glow-worm's lamp in June —but while he gazed, another flashed out, nearer than the first—another and another.

At the same time, while in this new excitement, this wonder, he had well-nigh forgotten that which had at first moved him, a step sounded close at his elbow, a hand

was laid upon his arm, and a harsh voice murmured in his ear;

"Ha! Colonel Desmond?—said I not the truth?—or what say those beacon-lights, unless that Dublin is relieved, and the enemy on Irish soil?'

It was the voice of Hugh O'Neil; and as he turned his head to the speaker, the ungainly form and hideous features, lighted up now by a half-triumphant smile, met his eyes.

Almost bewildered, and what was most unusual in him, surprised not a little, Florence Desmond set down the lamp upon the board with an unsteady hand.

'And thou?' he said, 'and thou, Hugh O'Neil—whence comest thou?'

'Whence come I, noble colonel? None should know that, I think, better than thou who hast kept watch over me, as a cat doth over a mouse, since supper-time. Whence come I?—why, from that chamber surely. Though how the door came open, and the lamp-stand which was beside my bed o'erthrown, I comprehend not.'

'And thou wert asleep, O'Neil?'

'Surely. What else should I be—the waking thoughts of one sentenced to be hanged at daybreak, in case a courier's horse should cast a shoe, or a watchman sleep at his post, and so kindle not his

beacon, are none, I trow, so pleasant that he should keep late vigils.'

'And didst sleep through it all—through all that clang and clatter?'

'What clang and clatter? Nay, worthy colonel, it is thou, methinks, who art asleep and dreaming.'

'I tell thee, Hugh O'Neil, I heard thee in a low conversation with some one within thy chamber—I forced thy door with din enough to wake the dead; and dost tell me thou didst sleep through it all? Besides, I heard the closing of another door, after I had forced that one. The priest—Hugh O'Neil—the priest Daly was with thee!'

'Was he?—It must be in the spirit then, for surely in the body he was not. But is there another door?' he added, most naturally. 'I lived here many years of my life, and have played here when a boy, when these rooms were all bare and unfurnished, many a day, and never knew of one.' Then altering his tone a little—'I have good cause of complaint, of quarrel in all this. Thou wert my warder in all honour—not my jailor; and thus to break open my chamber-door somewhat exceeds a gentle warder's duty. But in these evil times, suspicion seems to hang o'er all men; and I suppose I must e'en forgive you—the rather that those beacons do proclaim my tidings

true—disastrous though they be—and set me free alike from doubt and durance. Is it not so, Colonel Desmond? See, there are seven of them now!'

Moved far more by the confirmation of the fatal news—which, up to this time, he had doubted, than by any care for O'Neil, Desmond again turned to the casement—and from it, past the possibility of doubt, beheld along the line of distant hills, nearer and nearer from the northward, seven twinkling stars of fire. An eighth broke out while he was gazing; but, strange to tell, ere it had burst into full power, although at first it seemed to blaze cheerily enough, it sank at once, as if water had been cast upon it, and was extinguished utterly, no more to be relumed.

Desmond gazed on O'Neil, and O'Neil on Desmond; but neither spoke, nor made any sign of the wonder which certainly both felt at the time the strongest feeling of his heart.

They turned again toward the casement: and lo! in the brief interval since the last was quenched, the next beyond it toward Dublin had evanished likewise. The other six continued blazing lustrously and strong, and flaring higher heavenward, perhaps because the watchmen saw their signals unrepeated. Perhaps because the chain was

interrupted thus; perhaps because some intervening height cut short the view of the farther balefire from the men at the nearer stations, no nearer alarmfire heralded the tidings of invasion, and all the neighbouring moors and cultured vales beneath, up to the base of huge Slievh-Buy, lay buried in blank darkness.

But if, until now, surprise, and the quick succession of events, had held Florence Desmond inert and inactive, he now recovered all the energetic readiness of mind which had rendered him so famous as a soldier, in both hemispheres.

He cast the casement open by which he was standing, discharged the pistol which he held high into the air, and shouted at the top of his voice:

'Alarm!—alarm! Treason—treason!'

His pistol-shot was answered by the discharge of harquebuss after harquebuss, on the platforms of the ramparts—on the turret-tops—at the gate-houses—far down the hill-side, and lastly, by the roar of a culverin on the dungeon-keep, and the jarring clang of the great alarum-bell.

Meanwhile, with shout and gathering cry, and clash of arms, the garrison came together in the court-yard; and within five minutes of the discharge of Desmond's pistol, a quick step came hurrying up the winding-

stair to the antechamber door, and a well-known voice exclaimed without:

'Open—open to me, Florence Desmond. It is I, O'Brien!'

He drew the bolts, and admitted instantly the lord of the castle, who started back as he entered, and saw O'Neil, standing, apparently, in close conversation with Florence Desmond; for, somehow or other, hearing that the alarm had been given from the turret in which the former was confined, he had connected it indistinctly with his escape—though how that should have occurred, he could not comprehend.

'My tidings are proved true, cousin of O'Brien. Now, at least, I may thank you for your generosity, and claim some shew of hospitality, at least, if not of courtesy, at your hands!' exclaimed Hugh O'Neil bitterly, as his cousin's eye met his own.

'Is it—can it be possible?' cried O'Brien, looking at Desmond for an answer; 'God of my fathers! Ormond, beaten and Cromwell on the shores of Erin!'

But Desmond had no hopes to give him. He shook his head, and pointed with his hand to the open casement, and to the ominious bale-fires, blazing red, but still unrepeated, on the far horizon.

'It *is* true! Heaven and all its saints defend us, and protect the cause!—for it

shall now need their protection. Yes, sir,' he added, turning toward O'Neil, but with a frowning aspect, and a voice—if it were possible—even colder then he had used to him before—'Yes, sir, you *are* free, and shall be treated henceforward with all hospitality, all courtesy. But, mark me, Hugh O'Neil, not *trusted*. Had your heart, as you aver, been true, been Irish, rather had you swung from the flag-staff on this very tower on which we stand, knowing that Erin was yet free, unsubdued, and hopeful, than sat the lord of this fair castle in its fairest hall, knowing her but the victim, but the slave, but the spoil of the bloodthirsty, church-destroying Puritan. Go, sir—go! You are free, I say—but not trusted!'

'You do me great wrong, cousin,' replied Hugh. 'No man deplores more deeply than I do the peril of our common country—no one will fight farther to defend her—no one, I may say, loves her better!'

'These things proved, we will trust you; till then, not a hand's-breadth! Deeds speak; words often, truly interpreted, are but silence. Act, and we shall hear!'

He bowed, and turned on his heel, repeating, as he did so:

'You do me great wrong, nevertheless, and one day will know it.'

'I hope so,' said O'Brien. 'In the

meantime, far rather would I wrong you, wrong myself, wrong Desmond here, than wrong Erin—than wrong the cause of our monarch—of our God! Ho! Ulick—Con O'Brien!'

And at his call, the two young men, who had halted halfway up the stairs, when the earl entered the antechamber, appeared fully armed at the stair-head.

'Look you; our cousin here,'—and he spoke somewhat sneeringly—'has proved his good faith thus far; that Ormond is undoubtedly repulsed from Dublin, as he told us yesterday, and the accursed Puritan upon our shores; events at which, I must say, he seems to rejoice mightily. His truth is proved, however, thus far, and our promise must be kept inviolate.—Henceforth he is our guest; attend him with all honour; suffer him to go where he will—to do what he will; only observing, that he hath no command whatsoever; and suffer him to converse at his pleasure, with any of his friends and——'

'Excepting always, I beseech you,' Desmond interrupted him, 'the good priest, Father Daly!'—

O'Brien looked quickly at the colonel, and reading a deep meaning in hs eye, took up his words without question or comment.

'Excepting always Father Daly. And now, cousin Hugh, I must needs pray you to excuse me; these gentlemen will wait on you; but for me, I would hold counsel here awhile with Colonel Desmond. I will join you within the hour, in the guard-room. Ulick,' he added, 'although we supped so late, still we will breakfast somewhat early. See that the cooks and butlers have all in readiness at daybreak. Not in the grand hall of the keep, but in the great stone hall of the outer guard-house. Now, Florence, we will speak together.'

And at the signal, they were left alone. When Desmond, after relating to him hastily his suspicions concerning the priest and O'Neil, and the manner of his awakening, called his attention as to a thing of far more present importance, to the fact of the two nearest beacons having been almost simultaneously extinguished—showed that no effort had been made to rekindle them, and that the line was evidently broken, although those farther off toward Dublin were blazing brilliantly as ever.

'What it may mean', he added, 'you should be better able to explain than I—seeing that you must needs know all the stations.'

'The nearest that is now alight,' replied O'Brien, after examining them carefully,

with a prospective glass, as it was then termed—a very rare implement in those days—'is the Hill of Muckla, and beyond that, Lugnaguilla Mount, and Atinmoe.—Those which you saw blaze up and then expire, are the heights of Carysfort, and Killahurler Hill, over Arklow. The nearer stations, which have not been lighted, are Ballyfad and Moniseed, and the Crag of Ask, next to us in the valley.—Which went out first, the blaze on Killahurler or that on the heights of the Carysfort?'

'The nearest this way—Killahurler; it scarce blazed half a minute.'

'I thought so, Florence. 'Tis the loftiest hill on this side Shranamuck above the deer-park, and so lofty that neither Ballyfad nor Moniseed can see beyond it. Hence is the chain of light interrupted. But we will set it going once again. Ho! there, on guard—without!' he shouted, leaning with half his body out of the narrow casement.

'Hillo! my lord—what ho!' was shouted up from the court-yard.

'Kindle the beacon speedily—fire-lights are blazing far and wide on Muckla Hill, and Lugnaguilla Mount, on Atinmoe, Killday and Shranamuck. By some mischance, the fires have failed on Carysfort, and Killahurler, and hence the vale hath lost the

tidings. Light up! I say, light up—and that right speedily!' Then lowering his voice, he added, 'No mischance, noble Florence—no mischance, I fear, but treason.'

'I am not sure of that,' replied Desmond, who had pondered deeply, and was looking over a small rough map of the country, which happened to hang upon the turret-wall, perhaps as an aid to the warder, whose chamber that was in ordinary times. 'I am not sure. Here runs the high-road, if I read it right, over the very highest point of Killahurler, just where the cross-road bears away from Arklow. How far from that stands the beacon?'

'Some quarter of a mile, I think,' replied O'Brien, 'on a high, bare rock to the westward. But what matters it?'

'Again. The same road seems to skirt the lower spurs of Carysfort. How far is that road from the beacon station?'

'Three hundred yards, or over. I know it well, because I marked out the last six from the Hill of Muckla.'

'Marked them out, I fear, badly, Dermot,' said the other, gravely. 'One question more—for I have well-nigh lost my memory of distances, in my long absence, though the names dwell with me like strains of old remembered music. How many miles is it from Carysfort to Killahurler?'

'Six miles, by the road—perhaps seven. In a straight line, it should be about five. I wish you would explain.'

'So that in case the van of a force, say some four or five thousand strong, had reached the hill of Killahurler, its rear might well be passing the heights of Carysfort, at the same hour. Cousin mine—cousin mine, what is once done cannot be amended—but if it be to do again, it may well be bettered. When next you select beacon stations, let them be in the pathless solitudes of hills, or on the bare expanse of moors, afar from all great roads, out of the way of marching armies.'

'Why, what do you imagine, Desmond?'

'That a strong force of Cromwell's men are marching hitherward. That the van mounting Killahurler have observed all the country in their rear blazing with beacons, and perceiving how that station domineered all others, have seized the hill just as the beacon was enkindled. Their rear have done the same by Carysfort, and secure now against further spreading of alarm, are marching with all speed hitherward. If I am right, we shall know it ere long.'

'But why should such a force march hitherward? Ormond doubtless is gone northward.'

'No one can say! It were sound policy,

however, and good strategy, not unlike Cromwell's crafty foresight, to detach force enough to hold in check these southern counties—nay, even to capture you—yourself, O'Brien, known for the most puissant, and not least ardent or least dangerous of the king's leaders, here in Leinster.'

'But scarce with such a force as four thousand or five thousand men.'

'Oh! that is mere conjecture; only thrown to account for the space between the head and rear of the marching column. They may be but a thousand marching by detachments—they may be delayed by artillery or baggage—they may have straggled—as will happen in night marches—in the darkness. But of a truth, I little doubt we shall see English troops arrayed against these walls before noon to-morrow.'

'May God forefend!' cried O'Brien. 'There are not three days' food in the garrison for the men who are now within it; nor two when those pour in who will pour in on the enemy's approach.'

'In God's name then, O'Brien, let four-fifths of your garrison go forth, at once, without an hour's delay, in little squads of five and ten, under trusty men, to sweep all the country round for ten miles, of cattle, grain, and forage. For the rest, none but men capable of bearing arms must be ad-

mitted; and it were well at daybreak to send forth all the women, children, and old men who are now within. I would the countess and Ellinor were without the walls now. In the open country even these Puritans will not harm helpless, unarmed men, much less women; but when a place is stormed, no man can say what shall happen.'

'A place stormed! Think you, Florence Desmond, that the strength of all the world could *storm* the Red Castle of the O'Brien?'

'I have seen stronger places by the half stormed in two hours by a thousand men!' replied the veteran. 'Castle O'Brien is a fine old feudal fortress—a good irregular work, but totally incapable of any long defence. But do not answer me, I pray you, cousin; but rather give the orders I suggest for victualling the castle. Then join me again here. This is the best post of observation.'

O'Brien answered nothing—but although very far from being edified by the slighting opinion of his cousin as to the defensibility of the time-honoured keep of the O'Briens, he had too great regard for that cousin personally, and far too high an opinion of his military talents, knowledge, and experience, to waste valuable time in vain debate. He

descended, therefore, at once to the court of the castle, where his voice was soon heard issuing the necessary orders, above the clang of hoofs, and the clash of armour and accoutrements, as party after party rode forth from the gates as fast as they could prepare themselves for action.

Meanwhile the beacon on the dungeon-keep blazed out triumphantly, and the dark ruddy glare which it poured forth dyed all the pavement of the court and the red free-stone buildings of the castle with a strange lurid crimson, and flickered on the armour of the mustering retainers in the court below, arming them, as it were, in panoply of gold; and far without the walls changed the green garb of summer into the sere leaves of autumn, and gleamed upon the outworks, and cast blacker shadows into the abyss of the ravine beneath, like some tremendous and portentous meteor.

Ere long the stations in the plain below, catching the meaning of that sudden light, though it came in a different direction from that they expected, and comprehending that, from the castle top, perched as it was on the giddy crags of Slievh-Buy, many points northward were in view, to themselves invisible, lighted their bale-fires, one by one; so that the chain of signal fires was spreading toward a common centre from

both extremities—that common centre being the dark and still unresponsive heights of Killahurler.

Anxiously now did Florence Desmond watch the progress of those blazing pyres, for on that progress depended the frustration, the verification, of his fears.

The Crag of Ask blazed first, and that comparatively at so short a distance from the castle, that the keen eyes of the watcher, assisted by his powerful glass, could mark the red reflection wavering and winking in the mountain loch at the crag's foot.

Then Moniseed, in turn, kindled a broader and a brighter blaze, for it flared upon the turret of a tributary chief, a friend and fellow-soldier, as a namesake, of the O'Brien.

Then the fir-wooded ridge of Ballyfad replied; and for a while Desmond was anxious, in the hope that it might be from negligence or sleep that the watchers on Killahurler had failed in their succession, and that, now wakened to their sense of duty by this counter illumination, they might dispel his fears by a late but welcome response.

But no light came upon these rugged summits, nor on the heights of Carysfort beyond; and after watching them for better than a quarter of an hour, he closed the perspective glass with an ominous shake of the

head, and turned into the chamber lately occupied by the O'Neil, to examine into, and if possible verify, the cause of his late suspicions.

To this task he applied himself with all the shrewd tact and experience of a veteran soldier; and yet so poor had been the art of the deceivers as compared to the keen-sightedness of him they would have deceived, that he had not well stepped across the threshold before all his suspicions were confirmed by the first signs which met his eye—and which O'Neil, whether under-valuing the powers of his antagonist, or unable through the darkness to perceive the tale they told, had failed to remove before coming out into the antechamber.

The first of these was a broken dagger lying on the floor at the opposite side of the apartment, whither it had been driven by the violence of the blow which forced the door—as was clearly shewn by a fragment of its glittering blade still sticking fast in the black oak door-post above the latch which it had been intended to confine.

The next was the fact that the lamp-stand which O'Neil had unquestionably overturned himself as he lay in bed, the better to conceal the flight of his nocturnal visitor, lay just where it had fallen, far too remote from the door to have been over-

turned, as the renegade insisted, by that concussion.

The damning proof of all consisted, however, in a white linen handkerchief of a particularly fine fabric, such as in those days, and especially in that country, would have been carried by no one but by a woman or a priest—which, if farther assurance had been needed, had a border of peculiar Flanders lace. And this, with which, as a traveller, and long a dweller of the Low Countries, he was well acquainted, he recognised at once as having seen it that very day in the hands of the priest, Ignatius Daly.

'Ha!' muttered Desmond to himself, 'I have not made the Virginia voyage all for nothing; nor must they leave so broad a trail as this, who would escape the eyes of one who has hunted with the best of the Appalaches! Come—come, sir priest!—we have you clear enough. It remains only to discover whither you have fled, and by what passage.'

Thus saying, he passed round the whole circuit of the chamber, lifting the tapestry, and examining the oaken wall beyond it, in the hope to discover the hinges or spring of some concealed door. But there was none; or if there were, it was concealed so skilfully that it escaped his nicest scrutiny.

His next search was the floor, and here, frustrated in the first place, he confidently expected that he should find a trap. But here he was more decidedly at fault than before. For the chamber, being but small, was floored with undivided planks running from wall to wall unbroken, and as no one of these exceeded seven or eight inches in width, it was impossible at a glance that any aperture could be wrought in one of these, capable of admitting the body of a man.

Then he returned to the walls, and proceeded to sound the wainscoating round the whole circuit of the room with his dagger's hilt; but here again his art failed him; for it appeared that there was a small space all around between the woodwork and the wall, so that all alike sounded hollow to the blow.

Baffled, but not yet balked, he paused a moment to reflect, and then turned with a smile on his face into the other room, and returned in an instant, bearing in his hand a small lighted taper of fine virgin wax.

Stooping down, he applied the flame of this to the open crack or crevice at the junction of the surbace and the floor, and thus once again made the circuit of the chamber. The joiner's work of those days was far less complete and elaborate than it is now; and few doors or windows in the

newest and most gorgeous edifices but let in their currents of cold air. Florence Desmond was not surprised, therefore, to see his tell-tale taper's flame flicker and flare incessantly in the draught that rushed in through the ill-fitted wainscoating. But at length, when he reached a spot, where, though the joint appeared no wider than elsewhere, the flame was blown sheer out, he laughed a silent laugh, marked the place by sticking his poniard erect in the floor, and then brought from the outer room the larger lamp, which he set down on the centre-table, and his long Toledo blade still in the scabbard.

This he now drew. It was scarcely thicker than a sheet of paper, and of a temper so exquisite that the point and hilt might be bent until they met, and held in one hand, with no very great exercise of strength. Kneeling down, he thrust this fine blade in horizontally to the crevice, at several points before he came to the place which he had marked, and easily ascertained that the space between the oaken wainscoating and the stone wall of the turret was something less than a foot in depth. But when he reached the place indicated by the dagger, precisely as he had expected, the whole length of the blade passed in without finding any obstacle even at its extremity.

By making the blade vibrate, which he could do with ease, he likewise ascertained that there was a cavity at that point, far below the floor of the room; and by running the blade laterally to and fro, he discovered that the width of this hidden opening was precisely equal to that of one compartment of the pannelling.

'There is no secret any longer here,' he said quietly, as he arose to his feet. 'Daly did visit him, and here is the secret door from which he came. It remains only to see how it opens. But for that time presses not. Now let us see to these beacons, how they burn.'

And with the words he again entered the antechamber, and going to the window, smote his breast the instant he had looked forth into the night. 'Alas!' he exclaimed; 'alas!—it is too true! They are upon us, and in force!'

The light on Ballyfad, which had so brightly blazed a short half-hour before, the third light only from the castle walls, was black as night already; while those two nigher home, and those from Muckla Hill to Shranamuck, flared broadly to the sky as ever.

That broad and rapidly-increasing band of blackness indicated past a doubt the approach of the Puritan invaders.

Desmond now hesitated not a moment, but was just rushing down the stair to seek O'Brien, when he heard steps ascending—and, followed by his page, the earl stood before him.

'What next, good cousin?' cried O'Brien cheerfully. 'The men are all gone forth, save a score of guardsmen. We will have beef enough ere now to feed five hundred men a twelvemonth.'

'We shall need it,' replied Desmond gravely. 'I pray you send the boy for Ulick; you have great confidence in him?'

'Unlimited! Go seek him, Torlogh!'

'And lead him hither, but secretly; and, for your life! let no man know where we hold counsel.'

The boy bowed and left the room; and rapidly Desmond shewed all that he had seen, all that he had deduced, all that was now as clear as day. The earl, too, recognised the priest's handkerchief—and it remained only to discover whether the passage led, and what must be done to oppose the Puritans.

Ulick returned with the page; and merely telling him in brief that the O'Neil was surely proved a traitor, and desiring him, with Con's assistance, and such of the vassals as should be needed, to cast him as quietly as might be into the dungeon cell

beneath the massy-more, the earl gave him his signet-ring, dismissed the page, and turned once more to noble council with his best adviser.

Two things were to be first determined —whether to abide the Puritans within the walls, or break forth and attempt to join the ranks of Ormond.

Whether to attach the priest at once for treason, or to meet his deep villany with a face of profound confidence.

And it was well nigh impossible to decide on either course, so great and so nicely-balanced were the obstacles to all.

The impossibility of any long defence, and the general good of the royal cause, calling, as it did, loudly for a concentration of its partizans, plead loudly for an attempt to break forth and join the duke in the north.

The number of ladies in the castle, the great age and infirmity of the countess, whom it were equally impossible to carry with them or to abandon to the Puritans, seemed to make flight impracticable, as surrender and resistance were already hopeless.

Again, sound policy, and self-defence, and justice appeared all alike to demand putting the priest at least in temporary durance, until the present peril should be overpast. While on the other hand, the difficulty of believing that, however he

might plot, and scheme, and struggle for ascendancy and power among his own people, a priest of the true church should play the traitor, yielding up his own sheep-fold to the wolf, rendered even those two clear-headed and unsuperstitious leaders doubtful what it were best to do, in very truth and wisdom.

When policy, however, and expediency were considered, both felt that it were to risk the very foundation of their own honour and authority, even over the most devoted of the clan, to attempt to lay the secular arm upon the revered person of the priest.

This point was, therefore, soon determined —to keep the priest under strict surveillance, but to hazard no overt action until he should so commit himself as to leave not a doubt of his guilt.

While they were yet debating what should be done on the greater and more momentuous question, a bugle was so clearly and so shrilly winded at the foot of the castle hill, before the lower gate-house, that Desmond and O'Brien felt instantly convinced that the crisis was at hand.

So still was the night, and so small the actual distance in a direct line, although the traverses of the ascent made it both long and tedious, that they could hear a brief parley from the barbican, though the words

they might not distinguish; and then the creaking of the rising grate, and the clatter of the falling drawbridge met their ears.

Without one word, with scarcely one glance interchanged, they hurried down the winding stair, and reached the castle court, just as Ulick returned, breathless, pale, and agitated, to state that Hugh O'Neil could not be found anywhere within the castle.

Interesting as at any other time such news would have been to both the hearers, all thought of their own danger; all care for the miserable traitor was merged in the absorbing, thrilling eagerness, with which they heard from without the walls the cry:—

'Tidings from the host! A messenger from the duke!'

'The gates were thrown open at the word, and supported on each side by three of the earl's men-at-arms, whose united strength barely sufficed to keep the wretched jade from falling, spur-galled, and foam-embossed, what had once been a noble courser reeled into the court, bearing a man so spent and exhausted that he could scarce keep his saddle.

His last breath had well-nigh been expended in that keen bugle blast.

They lifted him from the saddle; and as they loosed their hold upon the horse, it stumbled, rolled over, and expired within a

yard of the earl's feet; while the rider, almost fainting, could not speak a word, though the fate of hundreds hung upon his tongue, and gold, more than he ever saw or dreamed of, would have recompensed his ready speech.

CHAPTER VIII.

> 'There was a deep ravine that lay
> Yet darkling in the Moslem's way;
> Fit spot to make invaders rue
> The many fallen before the few.
> The torrents from the morning sky
> Had filled the narrow chasm breast-high;
> And on each side, aloft and wild,
> Huge cliffs and toppling crags were piled,
> The guards with which young freedom lines
> The pathways to her mountain shrines.'
>
> THE FIRE-WORSHIPPERS.

'BRING him wine—bring him wine,' exclaimed O'Brien; 'see you not that he is so much exhausted that he cannot speak! And you, the rest of you, fall back to your posts; the morning must ere long be breaking. How wears the night, Torlogh?'

'It wants as yet two hours of day, my

lord,' replied the page; 'but here is the wine.'

A large goblet was poured out and handed to the messenger, and he quaffed it as one to whose lips any liquid had been long a stranger—then drew a long, deep breath, shook himself till his iron brigantine rattled upon his back; and then said these words only:

'For your private ear, my lord of Thomond.'

'Come, Florence,' said the earl; 'you shall pass for mine ear this once. Lead the man to the little hall, Torlogh. And you, Con and Ulick, make closer search for him you know of: he *must* be within the walls of the castle.'

And with the words he turned into the *corps de logis* of the castle, and entering the little hall, which passed, in those rude days, and that half-civilised realm, as a sort of library; for there was a case or two of ponderous tomes against the wall, and standish, with pens and parchment, on the board, and one or two maps hanging upon the wainscoating, among coats of curious antiquated armour, hunting-poles, bugle-horns, cross-bows and other implements of sylvan warfare hanging from antlers of the deer and elk, and of that huge fossil stag, larger, five-fold, than any living species of

the cervine race—which is still found in the bogs of Ireland.

Here, flinging himself into a high-backed arm-chair, and motioning Colonel Desmond to another—

'Now then, my man,' he said; 'you may speak freely. I am Dermot O'Brien, Earl of Thomond; and this is Colonel Florence Desmond, whom everybody knows, on either side, for one of the king's truest servants, and best soldiers. What says the Duke of Ormond?'

'His grace was assailed in his quarters, the night before last, my lord,' replied the man, after bowing lowly to the great personages he addressed, 'by an unexpected sally of the whole garrison, under the Roundhead Jones; and was so hardly handled, in fact so much cut up—losing above three thousand men in killed and wounded—that he deemed it advisable—the rather that he heard the next of Cromwell's landing on the coast with twelve thousand foot, and two thousand superb horse—to raise the siege of Dublin instantly, and to retreat upon Tredagh; where, deeming himself now too weak to cope with the enemy in the open field, he proposes to establish a *place d'armes*, and maintain himself until such time as he may again gather head enough to take the

initiative. Here are his grace's cypher and sign-manual. He lacked the time to write, beyond the words you will find there set down.'

These words were—'Trust the bearer. He has my confidence, and can give tidings of our movements.—Ormond.'

'I know your face, it seems to me, good fellow,' said Desmond. 'Have we not met before?'

'And I knew yours, colonel, from the first.'

'But your name?' asked Desmond!

'You saved my life at the taking of Breda!'

'What—my old friend, Shaun McMorris! But you are sorely changed.'

'This rapier cut, my colonel, would change a fairer face than mine,'—and the poor fellow laid his finger into the cicatrix of a deep scar that had destroyed the sight of one eye entirely, cutting from the insertion of the eyebrow sheer down to the jaw-bone.

'True—true!' said Florence. 'Dermot, you may trust this man to the end—I will avouch him.'

'It needs not; his credentials are sure,' said O'Brien, who had been examining some private marks on the documents he bore. 'Proceed, good fellow—these are ill tidings, but we looked for them. Proceed—yet

hold, you are aweary; sit, and tell your tale at leisure.'

Again the man bowed low, and taking a lower seat at a respectful distance, proceeded with his narrative of evil and disaster.

'Well, noble sir,' he said, 'he fell back —as I told you—at once, and so speedily, that it was not until we reached Ratoath, that he could halt so long as to frame his orders to his friends and send off messengers. So it was then he sent me to yourself, my lord, to pray that you'd join him with every horse and man that you can make, as soon as may be. But if, by the Lord's grace, you join him at all, it is by making a great circuit only that you'll do it. It seems to me the whole country's full of those Roundhead Ironsides, as they call them. It's yestermorning they gave me chase, nigh Cloncarty, where I crossed the Boyne, thinking that I should be far enough to the west of them there: and by my faith, they never gave me up till I got a fresh horse in Blessington, and so gave them the slip. And twice since they have beset me hard—once nigh Rathdrum; but they were footmen only, and I got easily away from them; and again, as I crossed Killahurler heights, above Arklow—for there I fell into the midst of a whole army of them—cannons, and foot,

and horse. Two horses I have killed outright since I left there, beside the one that's dying in the court-yard now, or dead; and that was given me at Ballyfad, by your kinsman in the tower. But I'm here now—blessed be the Lord!—and you have the tidings better late than never. But there's no time to lose; for if I judge aright, that army that I saw is bound for this same place where we now sit, and will be here ere many hours.'

'They are even now at Ballyfad, good friend,' said Desmond. 'So far, your tale needs no confirmation.'

The man stared at him, something wildly, and then asked:

'How can you know that, colonel? They were not within eight miles of it when I left them, and no man or horse can have outstripped me.'

'We saw their coming all the way from Carysfort and Killahurler, by the extinguishing of the hill lights. Ballyfad was a-blaze an hour agone, and now it is all darkness. But why,—if the duke was assailed two nights ago—were not the beacons kindled yesternight? Had that been done, we had ere now, been half-way to Tredagh, which, Heaven grant, we may now ever see!'

'Forgotten, noble colonel—clean forgotten in the confusion of defeat, and the hurry of retreating.'

'Most lamentable and fatal forgetfulness! But look you here, McMorris; we had this news of the duke's defeat, at high noon yesterday, by a man and horse—and a marvellous ill-favoured horse too. How should that be?'

'He must have been the devil then,' said the old soldier bluntly, 'or a Roundhead, which is next akin to it; for he must have come straight from the field, and through the very lines of the enemy; and then, no one horse could have done it that ever had his hoof shod with iron. Who was the man, colonel?'

I fancy, McMorris,' replied Florence, with a grave smile, 'that he is, as you say, a Roundhead, and somewhat akin to the devil also.'

'Well, that is all your tidings, is it?' said the earl. 'And what are the duke's commands to yourself, McMorris?'

'To hold myself entirely at the orders of your lordship.'

''Tis well! Go then now and rest and refresh yourself: we shall have work enough for you ere long. Without there—Torlogh!' —and then, as the page entered, 'See to this man,' he added, 'and then, let my cousins know I wish them here forthwith.'

'God of my fathers! Florence, what is to be done?' he added, as the boy left the

room with the messenger. 'We have sent four-fifths of the garrison abroad, and they will be upon us ere they can return!'

'Go see your mother instantly, O'Brien; prevail upon her, if you may, to leave the castle on the instant; we can convey her by the horse-litter through the hills. Ellinor and the other ladies must take horse. The servant girls, and all who are not soldiers, can disperse into the country and hill villages in safety. Then we will get to horse with all the men we may; we can make thirty lances here. Ulick and Con must ride forth, at all events, muster the men we have sent out, and lead them through the passes of Slievh-Buy to Carnew and Rathvilly; there let them tarry till we join them, or till they hear that we are all cut off, as we must be. I rejoice, for my part, that the men *are* gone—for they could not avail us aught, and would but swell the numbers of the slain. When we rejoin them, or when all is over, their course must be with all speed to Tredagh. Do you approve my plan?'

'In all things, Florence—in all things, save one. It is the true—the only plan; yet it is naught.'

'And wherefore?'

'My mother will not leave the castle living. She swore it when my father died.

She has sworn it since' a hundred times in my hearing!'

'Then God have mercy on our souls!—for the Puritans will have none on our bodies!'

'But what then, Florence—what is to be done, then?'

'Even the same. Let Ulick and Con lead the men away to his Grace of Ormond. They cannot possibly rejoin us—and if they could, could not save us. They shall so do good service yet, and perchance win for the king, when we are—where—who knoweth?'

'True; you are right as ever—true. I will go to my mother, if aught may prevail with her. Give you the orders to our cousins.'

But as he spoke, the young men entered the room.

'Time presses us,' he said, 'very hard, cousins; so I will pray you take your instructions from our good cousin Florence here, and obey him as if they were my own. But first, have you found any traces of O'Neil?'

'None; though we have searched from the turret to the donjon—from the buttery to the hay-loft.'

'But one word more, before I leave you. You will have to go forth, as the colonel will direct, to join the foragers; but first

pass the word through all the men who remain, to shoot O'Neil dead at the first encounter. He is a traitor and a spy, past doubt. Fare you well, and God speed you!'

He shook hands with them both, and a tear twinkled in his eye, as he turned and left them. Though he said nothing, he believed surely that his last hour was come, and that he should never look upon those beloved faces any more.

No time was lost, and before O'Brien returned, Florence Desmond had the satisfaction of seeing these two gallant youths gallop down the hill beyond the outposts, accompanied each by a single follower; and he thanked his Maker fervently, as he followed them down the hill with his eye, in the bright light of the new-risen morning, that they at least, were saved, literally as brands snatched from the burning.

This was scarcely done, and all the armed men at their posts at the outworks, with guns loaded and matches lighted—a mere warder's guard being retained in the castle, which could not be attacked until these were carried — before O'Brien returned, pale, downcast, and as it seemed, despairing —but still resolute and self-composed.

Desmond read at a glance all that had occurred.

'Is she so resolute?' he asked.

'Even so resolute!'

'And you explained all to her?'

'All!'

'The service we might do to the king, if not cooped up here—our duty to our country and our God calling us to Tredagh—the hoplessness of defence—the want of provision—the certainty of being put—the men to the sword, the women to the last outrage?'

'All this, Florence Desmond—more than all this. I implored her—for Ellinor's sake—Florence Desmond—*Brother*,' he added, in a tone almost choked with intense agony—'*Brother*, you understand me—for Ellinor's sake we implored her for once to yield—to be persuaded?'

'And she answered?——'

'That they who were afraid might flee!—but that she had more faith in her God than she had fear of Cromwell. We have but one duty now.'

'But one,' answered Florence Desmond. 'The ancients were wont to say—"*Deus dementat prius quos vult perdere.*" The madness is here of a certainty—the very madness of self-will and proud stubbornness. May He grant that the ruin follow not; for He alone can avert it!'

'Amen!' answered O'Brien, fervently;

and then the two brave and high-spirited young men cast themselves into one another's arms, and embraced each other brotherly—for brothers they were, in soul, and hoped to be brothers ere long by a dearer, holier tie; and each felt a tear-drop trickle down his face from the eye of his kinsman; yet neither was ashamed for himself or for the other. For each knew that no extremity of pain or selfish sorrow could have extracted that sign of weakness—if it be weak to feel—which was given liberally, to a mutual sympathy, and to regret and fear for one dearer and more beloved than happiness, or light, or life to either. That moment was the last yielded to the affections. Thenceforth every thought was Duty's.

And the first was to drive forth, in mercy—for it literally was necessary to drive them—every unarmed man, every female, from the castle, even to the lowest household servants. In the cottage they were safe; in the castle, the law was then, as of yore, *væ victis*. And had it not been for the indomitable pride of that stern woman, she, too, and her fair niece, had been in safety as in honour; and how much human sorrow, how much human blood, how much human life, had been spared by her yielding?

Verily, pride hath much to answer for on earth, and this among the others!

The sun rose broad and bright; and, for the first time probably since its battlements first looked down over the tributary country, the castle of the O'Brien contained but two weak women, without a servitor or handmaid, unless it were the boy Torlogh, who was armed *cap-a-pie*, in light harness for his first field, and thirty men-at-arms, of whom well-nigh two-thirds were knights and gentlemen, O'Briens to a man—save Florence Desmond—and kinsmen of the earl, who moved among them as cold but as firm as an iron statue.

And now everything had been done that military skill or human foresight could suggest, to blunt the first attack of the Puritans, and check them for one day at the outposts. Little more indeed could they expect to do; for, with their diminished numbers, it was evidently impossible to defend the ramparts of the castle, when the esplanade should once be conquered, presenting, as they did, an assailable front, above half-a-mile in length, to be manned by a force of barely thirty men—a number insufficient not only to reload the guns, but even to discharge them all at once.

It was resolved, therefore, not to attempt to reload at all, but to fire by divisions—

each division being previously pointed by Florence Desmond's own hand, so as to bear upon the successive angles of the traverses which an attacking force must pass in order to attack the gate.

This done, and a large mine, the gallery of which ran under the rocky ditch, its chamber lying directly in front of the draw-bridge, being heavily charged with powder, to use as a last resource; and the masonry of the three gate-houses on the hill-side having been mined and crammed with *saucissons*, as they were then termed, or huge long bags of powder—the leaders turned to ask of each other first, 'What more?'—and then, '*Cui, bono?*'

And to either question, alas! the reply was but a melancholy shake of the head.

A few light horsemen were sent out to reconnoitre the advance of the enemy, with orders to feel their way cautiously, and to fall back at once, and at full speed, on recovering him.

A hasty meal was then partaken by all the defenders, silent and sad, and in strange contrast to the fiery and enthusiastic supper of the past evening; and then, as it was not yet eight of the morning, and at the earliest the enemy's outposts could not be on the ground before noon, all the garrison, with the exception of some half-dozen sen-

tries, to be relieved every hour, were dismissed, with advice to get a few hours of that rest which had been denied to them during the past night—and of which they would stand so much in need, if they were to make any adequate defence against the host which should be brought against them.

Once again—was it for the last time?—the chiefs were left alone.

'All is done now, O'Brien,' said Florence,—'all that man can do, I mean, to delay this ruin. Avert it none may but He to whom all things are possible, and He—with reverence be it said,—only by almost a miracle.'

'No,' answered Dermot, quickly, 'all is not done! Two things remain. First, that we find, and if possible, punish, this traitor, and then that I show you a secret. Come!'

'Whither!'

'First, to find Hugh O'Neil. With him in the garrison, all our defence may be made naught by the undoing of one bar.'

'But how—when the castle has been so searched?'

By this time they had reached the private armory adjoining the earl's own chamber, and there, arming himself completely in a suit of the finest steel, and making his friend do likewise, he placed a ponderous

battle-axe of the thirteenth or fourteenth century in his hand, and loaded four of the long horse-pistols of the day—two of which he placed in his own girdle, in addition to the usual sword and dagger which it supported, and gave the other two to Florence.

He then proceeded to load in the like manner, with the utmost care, two musquetoons, which he placed in the hands of the page, Torlogh; and nodding his head to his cousin, 'Now go,' he said, 'and force that door you wot of. Follow the passage to the end, unless it break into two branches. If it do, tarry at the fork, 'till I join you, or send Torlogh.'

Florence nodded assent.—'And whither you?'

'To the priest's chamber. No man hath seen him since he left the hall, at supper-time.'

'Can they have left the castle during the night together?'

'Impossible. I had the key myself of every port and sally-port, except the gate of the main-guard, and that was in the hands of the seneschal. But we have little time. Away! Follow me, Torlogh!

And through many an echoing passage, and many a low-browed door, he reached at length the grand staircase, climbed it with clanking steps, and paused opposite the fine

arch leading to the apartments of the countess, before the entrance of a suite of rooms, scarcely inferior to those in magnificence.

Here he knocked gently, then more loudly, then with all his force. He called, he shouted to the priest, demanding entrance, but in vain. At length, making the page set down one musquetoon, cocked and prepared for action, leaning against the wall, he bade him stand on guard with the other, and shoot dead the first person who should show himself, unless it were the father Daly—and to force even him to stand, at the peril of his life.

Receiving the boy's assurance of implicit obedience, and trusting even more to the enthusiastic tones of his voice, and the clear light of his eye, than to mere words, he seized his battle-axe, and demanding, for the last time, admittance, announcing his purpose of forcing his way in, if refused, he reared the ponderous weapon with both hands, whirled it round his head, and dealt such a blow on the very spot where the bolt of the massive lock shot into the staple, that it flew wide open in an instant.

Almost he expected to see the tall form of the priest, standing erect within the threshold, with arms uplifted, in the act of launching the awful anathema.

But the long sunbeams, full of dusty

moats, which streamed in through all the lofty mullioned windows, fell on no living thing. The noble room was vacant and untenanted. A second chamber lay beyond; secured by a like door similarly locked; and there the same scene was enacted, and with a like result. It was the bed-chamber of Father Ignatius; but the bed showed no signs of having been slept in the past night. The last room of the suite was the priest's private library and oratory, into which, since he had dwelt in the castle, no foot save his own had ever entered.

There was something of solemnity, of mystery, almost of sanctity, in the ideal atmosphere of this secret study, which made the earl pause and hesitate, ere he should compel admittance. But he thought of all that was at stake, and he was firm.

He pleaded, however, and argued, and entreated earnestly, if the father were within, that he would admit him to speak of matters of the utmost import, and not compel him to a deed which his heart abhorred. But no answer came. And so absolute was the silence within, that the earl was now satisfied that the priest had indeed fled by some secret mode of egress, which he knew not, from the castle, in company with the traitor Hugh O'Neil.

Then the hereditary quick blood of his race boiled in every vein, and flushed crimson to his face, as he exclaimed: 'Ha! false priest!'—and dealt the blow with such force and fury, that the strong door was dashed into shivers.

And there, at his desk, in his soft armed-chair, undisturbed by all the din, unmoved by all the splinters of the shattered wood which fell around him, some even on the parchment, whereon he was then engaged in writing, sat Ignatius Daly.

He raised his head calmly, as O'Brien entered, facing the intruder, with an aspect of benignity, and only asked:

'Wherefore "false priest," my son?'

O'Brien almost started, so much did the priest's coolness stagger him at first; but he was not a man to be deceived by such glaring stage effect, and the next moment he almost smiled at his own credulity.

'Pardon me the rude epithet, Father,' he said, 'I fancied, from your silence, that you had fled the castle!'

'Fled the castle!—and what if I had? Was I not dismissed hence last night! Fled the castle! and to what mortal suzerain am I a vassal,' he added proudly, 'that I should not, when and whither I list, go unbidden?'

'We will not enter into these discussions

now, Father Ignatius, since—as you well know, they amount to nothing; and if they did, this is nor place nor time for them. Nor will I tell you, seeing you know it full as well, if not better, than I do, that within three hours we shall be besieged by an overwhelming force of Puritans—and within six hours, or twelve at farthest—as we have neither men nor means to resist—stormed by them. But I will ask you, first, seeing that the Roundheads, when victorious by storm, not only give no quarter to men with weapons in their hands, but none to *priests*, to children, or to women, whether you will go forth yourself, as you still may, in safety, and persuade my mother, the countess, as you doubtless can, to go forth likewise—when we may all break out together, and join the duke in Tredagh, where, doubtless, we may serve our king and country better than by dying here cooped up within four walls like condemned captives?'

He spoke eagerly and rapidly—and though not rudely, with scant reverence; and then paused for answer.

'This, my son, is the first question; give us your *secondly*,' said the priest, sneeringly, if not scornfully. 'We will answer you both together.'

'My second is this — where is Hugh O'Neil?'

The priest laughed aloud. In all the years O'Brien had known him, never had he heard that sound from his lips, seen that expression on his face; and as the one was harsh, and dissonant, and fiendish, so was the other hideous and unnatural beyond description.

'You do me too much credit. I am but a man, my son, and you give me the attributes of a god. I have been shut up here since nine of the clock last evening, and you tell me that I know of the coming of the Puritans. How should I know it? Hugh O'Neil, since the same hour, has been under your own watch and ward. Did you make me his keeper, that you should ask me of his whereabouts?

'No!—nor his visitor,' replied the earl sternly. 'Yet you did visit him last night by the secret passage which leads hence to the turret chamber.'

'Is there such a passage, my son? I never heard of any such.'

'Nor I—nor perhaps *you*, most reverend,' answered O'Brien, detecting at once the quibble; 'but you *know* of it, for you passed through it last night, and left your vestment to bear witness of your passage.'

And he threw the handkerchief scornfully on the parchment before his face.

'But a truce to all this!' he added. 'Will

you tell me where Hugh O'Neil is? Will you persuade the countess to go forth?—will you go forth yourself, before this ruin fall upon us?'

'My son, I will do none of these three things,' replied the priest, with a quiet smile.

'My father, you shall do the last of these three things, and that straightway. Without there, Torlogh!'

'My lord,' said the boy entering, proud of his full armour, and his loaded musquetoon.

'Go summon hither Murtough, my foster-brother, and the deaf soldier, Shamus. Carry my ring to the seneschal, and bid him draw off all the men from the gates to the eastern rampart, leaving the sallyports unbarred, and the keys in the wicket locks. Hurry—life is upon your speed! Now, holy sir,' he added, 'I know not, and I care not very much, if I offend the Church in this or no. I have a holy duty to perform, as well as thou hast, to preserve my own life so long as God has need of it, and the lives of those good and tender ones whom He has given in my charge. Now I believe I cannot do these things while thou and O'Neil are at large within these walls. In time of siege the captain of the keep *must* be the master, and I *will* be! Therefore

thou must go forth! I might say, if I would imitate thy duplicity, I do this thing for thy good, and for the saving of thy precious life, lest, falling into the hands of the Philistines, they slay thee for a priest of Baal. I say not so. But thus: I send thee forth because I distrust thee altogether, and hold thee both enemy and traitor. Here come my men. The one cannot hear, the other will not heed, anathema or excommunication. Now then, sir priest, will you be thrust out perforce, or will you go forth willingly? If the latter, you are in lay vestments even now—you have arms, I see, beside you, and you know well how to use them. Here is gold; a horse awaits you in the court-yard. How will you go? Decide!'

'If I must be compelled into the choice—willingly. But oh, my son, my beloved son, reflect!'

'I have reflected. Put on your hat and cloak, most reverend, and buckle on the weapons of the flesh; and fare you well till better times come upon us. Here, Murtough, conduct the father to the court, you and deaf Shamus. Mount him upon Bay Barbary: he is the gentlest of the chargers in the court; see him beyond the outer gate-house in all honour. Fare you well, father. Favour me by proceeding with the soldier.'

'My blessings on your head, my son, and on all those within the castle!'

O'Brien bowed low, but replied not, but whispered to his foster-brother: 'Let him have speech with no man. Get him forth as quickly as may be. I suspect him very grievously of treason. Away with him—you understand me!'

'And obey you!'

'When he is forth, replace the guards, bring me the keys hither, one and all; be resolute and speedy—I await you! Torlogh, mount guard as before; suffer none to pass you!'

The men departed, leading, or rather escorting, the priest forth, as it would seem, in all honour; and as all the Catholic soldiers of the lower order, on whose superstitious fears he might have worked to the extent of inducing them to resist their lord's commands, had been withdrawn from the gates, his ejection was effected peaceably and speedily; and Murtough saw him ford the stream, and ride away to the right, into the deepest passes of the hills, before he left the gate-house. No fear of his tarrying in the neighbourhood of the fierce Puritans, to whom, what gave him sanctity in the eyes of others would but have marked him out, the more especially a victim to be

hunted down and slain without law or mercy.

Once gone, the soldiery were called back to their posts; and, thanks to the version which Murtough gave of the scene which had passed, and which the deaf man could not contradict, the piety and foresight of the O'Brien in removing the holy man from the peril of capture by his enemies, gave him yet another claim on the affections of the people.

Had they but known the truth, as it stood, one-half of them would have thrown down their arms indignant, and refused to fight in behalf of a lord so wicked as to have preserved their lives by such an act of profanation. Alas! unhappy land of Erin!—so brave, so generous, so sympathetic to the tear of sorrow—to the flush of noble indignation!—but seemingly for ever doomed, in all ages, barbarous or civilised, then as now, to perpetual dissension, everlasting agitation, everlasting sorrow! And all for one sole fault—the same in all times and all countries—that thy enthusiastic sons still yield their ears, their souls to the deceitful, maddening teachings of those who are too often, in the Latin poet's words, in truth *prava* jubentium!

Meanwhile, to still the tumult of his breast, to cheat the moments of terrible sus-

pense, in each of which he almost expected to hear the shout of meeting from the court or the ramparts, Dermot O'Brien applied himself carefully to examine the walls of the priest's apartment, in order to discover the exit of the secret passage, the entrance of which he had found above; but all his researches were in vain, and he had already given up the task in despair, and thrown himself into the chair from which the Father Ignatius had so lately arisen, with his face buried in his hands, and his whole soul given up to the darkest and most melancholy musings—when the clang of armed footsteps on the stairs, and the page's challenge without, roused him from his lethargy. Starting to his feet, and with a great effort banishing all signs of discomposure from his features—

'Ha!' he exclaimed, as his devoted foster-brother returned, bearing the heavy keys in his gauntletted hand, 'is it all done?—Is he forth?'

'He is forth.—God speed him!'

The young man's breast was lighter than it had been for hours. With the soldier's craft and villany he felt that he might struggle and succeed. But with the cold, apathetic, insolent, imperious falsehood, the tergiversating tact, the insinuating supple wiliness of the priest, he knew it vain to

contend. Telling his faithful friend rather than follower all that he knew and suspected of O'Neil's concealment, he posted him in the priest's oratory, with a horse-pistol in each hand, and strict orders to shoot the traitor dead the instant he should issue from his hiding-place; and, reiterating his commands to Torlogh, he hurried away to the turret, where he found Florence on the watch as he expected, at the very entrance of the passage, at the mouth of which there was a double bifurcation of four several mouths. Three of these were in a few moments ascertained to be mere blind turns, made in order to deceive a pursuer, and gain a few yards start for a fugitive in time of imminent peril. The fourth was a secret staircase, passing round and round the outer circumference of the tower, cut in the thickness of the tower wall, and corresponding exactly to the windings of the stair which occupied its centre. At about half the height of the tower, however, at the point where that sprang upward from the *corps de logis*, it struck off horizontally, and passed through three chambers curiously arranged among the rafters of the roof—all which were, however, vacant, nor gave any sign of having been tenanted for years. From these another stair descended rapidly, as they had anticipated, into the priest's chamber, which it entered,

as they easily discovered, from within, through the deep fire-place, one of the jambs of which was moveable.

So far their suspicions were confirmed; but their main object of arresting the traitor O'Neil, whom they confidently expected to find lurking there, was disappointed. And, it being manifestly useless to hunt and search out all the corners of so vast an edifice, provided, probably, with a thousand lurking places unknown to the lord of the castle, like that just discovered, though perhaps only too well known to his enemies, they gave up all hopes of detecting him, and contenting themselves with issuing strict mandates for his summary execution to all the soldiery, O'Brien proceeded to reveal to Florence and his foster-brother his last secret, by which alone he hoped to preserve, in extremity, the life, the honour, of his Ellinor.

After making the circuit of the walls, and satisfying themselves that as yet no symptom of the enemy's approach was to be seen, and that none of the scouts were as yet in sight on their return, the three once more descended into the great court, and thence passing into the stable-yard, entered the stables themselves, tenanted by at least a hundred of the finest animals, of the choicest breeds then known

and procurable, among which were four or five magnificent Arabians, two blacks of the tall breed of Dongola, and a beautiful flea-bitten grey Arab, which was set apart entirely to the use of Ellinor Desmond, than whom there was no better or more accomplished horsewoman within the circuit of the four seas that girdle Britain.

The poor animals, which had been somewhat neglected since the preceding evening, during the alarms of the morning, whinnied and stamped with pleasure, at hearing the steps of O'Brien and his friends. Nor was their confidence in man, this time at least, permitted to pass unrewarded. Policy as well as humanity required that animals, whose strength might ere long be taxed to the uttermost, should be preserved in the fittest state for action. But, had it not been so, the natural love of Dermot for the horse, and his kindliness of heart, would not have suffered him to allow them to want.

A very short time sufficed those three able and energetic men to water all the horses, and to supply their racks and mangers with such a store of provender and forage as would last them for three or four days, even should it be impossible to bestow much time upon them sooner.

This done, O'Brien unlocked an iron

door at the farther end of the stable, which led into a great dark vault, known as the ordnance vault, and filled with old-fashioned pieces of artillery, long since thrown aside as antiquated and unserviceable, broken carriages, honey-combed mortars, and such like ancient paraphernalia of warfare as were now entirely out of place in the light of day. Many of the castle servants and sub-officers had been in that vault from time to time, with the castellan; all knew exactly what it contained; and, as there was no mystery about it, and no interest or utility in its contents, no one thought anything about it, or cared to examine it farther. And yet it contained a secret of the deepest import.

In the farthest angle of the vault, which was entirely unlighted from without, and which could only be visited by aid of a lanthorn or flambeau, was a considerable space unencumbered by any heavy articles, and covered only by a pile of loose straw and litter, upon which two or three light gun-carriages had been stowed.

On removing these, and sweeping away the litter with a stable broom, there appeared a large wooden platform, strengthened by bars and heavy studs of iron, not at all unlike the platform of a modern hay-scale. O'Brien, however, knelt down be-

side, and, after a moment or two spent in searching, with the aid of the lanthorn he had brought, pushed aside the end of one of the iron bars, which disclosed a small keyhole, to which he applied one of a large bunch of keys that he had brought with him for the purpose. The wards were somewhat rusted, but a little of the heated oil from the lamp being poured into the lock, it yielded after a little solicitation; and with far less difficulty than could have been expected, the platform—which was in truth a vast trap-door—was raised by the force of a single man inserting a common pitchfork between the door and the framing.

It rose so rapidly indeed, when it was once set in motion, that it was evident at once, even to the rude and semi-educated Murtough, as he gazed with wide eyes of wonder into the dark abyss, that it must be actuated by some unseen counterpoise, as was in fact the case.

As it arose, nothing was visible but a steep stone descent, paved, like the rest of the vault above, with irregular cobble-stones, sloping gradually down into utter darkness, and disappearing under a grim stone arch, beyond which it turned abruptly to the left, and was lost to their eyes.

'Both of you must explore this with me

to the end,' said Dermot. 'But first do you step back, Florence, and bring us two or three flambeaux; they are in the rack just within the stable-door. Then lock the door of the ordnance vault within, that we may not be surprised.'

This was soon done; and the torches being lighted, they passed into the arched passage, lowering the door above their heads as easily as they had raised it. The passage, although steep, was of a slope so regular that it could be traversed easily by horses, and so lofty that a tall man on a war-horse could have ridden under the vault without stooping his head or breaking a feather of his plume. It was dry, too, although very cold, and the air was so pure that it was evidently ventilated by some means of communication with the purp'e sky.

Twice it was interrupted by huge iron gates, which yielded readily to some one of the keys with which the earl was provided; and, after passing the second of these, it expanded into a sort of circular hall, not now of masonry, but of natural cavern, aided a little by the chisel and the pick, provided with stone mangers and iron rings for fastening horses, and having in the middle a rude draw-well and chain. The egress from this hall was through a third gate,

heavier than any of the others, opening at the extremity of a deep-rifted mossy cave, the floor of which was covered by the waters of the black, wild-looking stream which roared and chafed before its entrance. Right opposite, the farther bank of ravine rose abrupt and precipitous, and, as the stream filled the gorge from bank to bank, leaving no space on either side for intruding footsteps, there was no risk whatever of the cavern's being visited; and even if it had, so dark was the recess in which the iron door was concealed, that it would have defied anything short of the deliberate search of persons acquainted with the existence of such a passage, and resolute to ascertain its whereabout.

'This is the Wolf's Glen, as they call it,' said Dermot, pointing to the gorge to the landward of the castle; 'that wall of rock is the first step of the great ridge of Slievh-Buy. A bowshot up the river to the right, a deep ravine comes down to it, through which there runs a difficult horse-path by which to gain the middle mountain road. You know which I mean, Murtough.'

The man nodded his head silently, in token of assent.

'An hour's hard riding will bring one to the cross-roads by the old chestnut tree with the three bodies growing into one.

An hour more, or two at the utmost, and you shall be at Carnew, where, before the sun sets to-night, Ulick and Con will be in waiting, with sixty or a hundred lances. Do you mark me?'

Again Murtough O'Brien nodded his assent, but that with a half-sullen face as who should say—'I mark, but I like it not.'

'And you, Florence Desmond?'

'Thoroughlyl.

'Let us return.'

And they did so, with all speed, locking the outer door behind them.

'Now, Murtough,' said O'Brien, 'I do not request you, for I know that you would refuse me, but I command—and I know that you will obey me—that you strike no blow in this strife to-day. In the first place, you will take these keys, and lead down to this under-ground stable here'—they were standing in it as he spoke—'the three black barbs of Dongola, and the Lady Ellinor's grey Arab, fully equipped and harnessed; the three for men-at-arms, the one for the lady. Leave them with food and provender for the day, and renew it daily. Lock all the doors behind you as you come and go, and beware no man sees you. Have thirty destriers saddled and bridled always, day and night, at the stables. That done, I make you

warder of the countess and Lady Ellinor; stir not from their side a moment, save when you go to feed the horses, and then let the boy Torlogh watch beside them, with his weapons cocked and loaded; remember the villain O'Neil is at large, and who shall guard them when we are on the ramparts? Will you do this?'

'By all my hopes of Heaven, I will; though rather tenfold, nay, ten hundred fold would I——'

'Die by my side, doubtless,' said O'Brien, hastily; 'but any one can die. It is harder oftentimes to live; and by living thou canst serve me; by dying, thou wouldst lose me my last hope.'

'I will live or die, how and when thou commandest, Dermot.'

Never before had he presumed to call his foster-brother by that familiar name, but when the feelings of the heart are stirred to the utmost, all forms are forgotten. The O'Brien felt, and hailed the emotion, and grasped the faithful being's hand with sincere sympathy.

'I knew thou wouldst, my Murtough; and therefore have I laid this heavy trust on thee; too heavy to be laid on any less true and trusty, less near of blood to the O'Brien.'

The man's eyes glistened with delight, as

he replied in tones that were actually husky with emotion: "May Heaven forget me, if I forget your bidding, Dermot!'

'It is well; here be the keys, one and all. One word more. By this pass, if it be possible, we will all escape, after we have given these rogue Roundheads such a salvo as shall turn their red noses pale,' he said, affecting a recklessness of humour which he was far from feeling. 'But if it come to the worst, Murtough, and the walls be scaled, or the gate forced, or if thou hearest the great mine explode—whether I be alive or dead, far or near—take the page Torlogh, and carry off the Lady Ellinor, by force, if needs must be, down this vault, locking every door from first to last behind you, and ride for your lives and her honour to Carnew.'

'Leaving you, my lord, my master, and my brother, to die unaided? Never, never!'

'Not so, true friend, not so. For if I be not with you to escape with my bride, I shall be, ere then, dead in the breach or the gateway. Murtough O'Brien, you have promised; I never knew you break a promise. Murtough O'Brien, your foster-brother calls on you for aid in his worst extremity. I think you will not fail him.'

'I will not,' said the man doggedly.

'But when I have done it, I will die;—by all the saints in Heaven!

'You will think better of it, Murtough. Good friend, you will think better of it. But you have made my heart very light—very light, my best Murtough.'

'And mine, God bless you for it!' added Florence Desmond, in his fine deep voice, a big tear standing in his eye as he spoke. 'The bitterness of death hath passed away.'

And as he uttered the words, they passed from the ordnance-vault into the stables; and as they did so, they heard hurried steps, and loud voices, hastening that way, and calling for the earl—the O'Brien.

'We are in time, and no more,' said he. 'Murtough! remember!' and he laid his finger on his lips hastily. Then as one or two of the men rushed in, eagerly seeking for him—'I come,' he said, 'I come. Look to these chargers, as I bade you, Murtough; they must not starve, an if we are besieged. Now, men, what is it?'

'Tidings of the foe, my lord,' cried one.

'The countess, my lord!—the countess!'

'Great God!—what of my mother?'

'She is dying!—the Lady Ellinor——'

'Go, go! O'Brien, exclaimed Desmond, rushing out of the stables. 'I will see to the tidings and the outposts. Fear

nothing; I can make them good these three hours.'

'They are at hand, my lord; they are close at hand. Even now you may hear their trumpets!'

And he spoke truth; for the instant they stood in the clear court-yard the flourish of the trumpets, and the clang of the kettle-drums of the Ironsides were heard distinctly, and the next moment the sharp and sudden roar of a culverin from the lower gate-house showed that they were even now within shot of ordnance.

Such was the scene in the midst of which the son was summoned to the death-bed of his mother; and, ere he stood beside her, the mighty ramparts, and the solid rock itself on which they stood, seemed to reel to the repeated crash, reverberated by a thousand echoes of the iron artillery.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLIGHT.

'Oh, God! It is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing,
In any shape, in any mood;
I've seen it rushing forth in blood—
I've seen it on the breaking ocean,
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion;
I've seen it on the ghastly bed
Of sin—delirious with its dread;
But these were horrors—this was woe,
Unmixed with such.'

PRISONER OF CHILLON.

It was a strange and awful picture. The beautiful light of a calm summer morning fell in gleams of gold and purple, of emerald and crimson glory, through the stained windows of the castle chapel; and there, before the rails of the high altar, at which she had been kneeling, when the shaft of the unseen destroyer found her, lay the majestic form of the old countess still in the agonies of death, proud and majestic, with

her head propped on the knees of her lovely niece, who, pale as the stone statues of the holy saints around her, yet resolute in that extremity of terror, ministered to the last wants of her dying kinswoman, alone upheld by her own nobility of purpose.

One of the sacred chalices stood beside them—the readiest, and only ready vessel *in extremis*, filled with wine brought in haste; and just below the altar steps stood the boy Torlogh, white as ashes, clad in complete steel, with a musquetoon on either arm, each with its slow match burning. He dared not, even in that dread juncture, disobey his lord, or leave them unprotected.

And upon this appalling group looked down, from the almost living canvass of the altar-piece, the calm, benignant face of the painted Saviour; calm and benignant, and fraught with love ineffable and unbounded mercy, even amidst the agonies of that dread, slavish death upon the cross. And on that wondrous form, and on those almost speaking lineaments, dwelt the fast-glazing eyes of the dying woman, drawing deep draughts of comfort from the sight, and hope beyond the grave, confident of immortality. And, all the while, the roar of the incessant ordnance, now mingled with the thick rattleof the volleying harquebuss, the clang of steel, and the shouts and shrieks of

combatants at hand-to-hand encounter, pealed upward to the pure and holy skies, as if the earth which He hath termed His footstool had been converted into a battle-ground for fiends.

A quick step clanged upon the chancel pavement. The dying woman's eyes turned to the sound:

'My son!—my son!——'

'Mother!—*my* mother!' and he kneeled beside her, and grasped her stiffening cold fingers, and his tears fell like fiery rain upon her brow. A life-time rushed upon his mind, in that most awful moment, and all things else were forgotten, as if they had never been.

'Weep not for me, my son—weep not for me. Happy am I to die the mistress of my own unconquered castle; thrice happy if I die *in time!* Tell me, oh, tell me, that my madness, my proud, selfish, wicked madness, has not ruined you. Tell me quick, for my spirit tarries only to hear that—without hearing which, I cannot pass in peace—tell me, my son, that you can save this angel from those howling fiends without!'

She spoke with strange rapidity, and with a mighty effort, and as if she spoke at all only by a prodigious effort of the will, and feared that her strength would fail her ere she finished.

'Mother! There *is* time, and *you*——'

'Shall die happy. Ellinor, your hand,'—and she placed it with her dying fingers in his hand. 'Bless you, my children! now you are *his*—Ellinor—his *wife!* Now you are bound to obey him, whatever he commands you! Promise me, my child!'

'I promise you, my mother.'

'Raise me—raise me, my children. I would fain die—standing!'

And they raised her erect to her feet; and she stood feebly for an instant, gazing on the image of her Saviour, with her poor arms outstretched toward it, as though she would fly.

'Kiss me—kiss me, children. I am going—going to your father. I will tell—him—how good—you have been—kiss me!'

Her words came at intervals; her breath was drawn laboriously; she seemed scarce conscious that they kissed her.

Then came a roar, a thousand times louder than the loudest crash of artillery—a short, breathless pause, and the rumbling din of falling masonry—another pause, and a shriek as of hundreds in their agony.

She heard, but understood it not. A light came into her eyes, and a flush on her pale cheek. She stood perfectly erect, and her lips moved; but those two only who

supported her, her children, could mark the words they syllabled :—

'In time!—the Lord be praised!—in time! *Domine nunc dimittis*——'

Her head drooped upon the shoulder of her son—she was dead!

Reverently he lowered her to the ground, closed those dear eyes, and pressed a long last kiss on the white, clay-cold lips to which he had so often clung in happy childhood—composed her limbs decently, covered them with her long robe; and then, lifting her in his strong arms over the railings of the altar, laid her on her back at its base, with her hands folded on her bosom, as if in the act of prayer.

'There even they will not dare to harm her!'

'What mean you, Dermot? You will not leave her so—it were sacrilege to do so!

'No to do so were sacrilege? Heard you not her last words? Obey!—you must obey now, Ellinor—however hard the task! We have no time for words. Now, Murtough,' he continued, as his foster-brother entered the chapel in haste, 'what meant that great explosion? For your life! Torlogh, fetch me a lady's riding hat and mantle of the warmest—for your life—fly! Now, Murtough?'

'They burst the two lower gate-houses

with petards, in a moment. They fight more like fiends than men; and one-third of our best men are down, they tell me! So Colonel Desmond drew off all the rest into the castle, but not until he had lit a three-minute match in the *saucissons* of the third gate-house. It blew up, I promise you, when there were more than two or three hundred in and around it, so that it killed about fifty, and maimed thrice as many. They have fallen back to the ravine's edge, and the colonel is plying them now with single guns, as you may hear, as fast as he can work them. But, oh, God! my lord—is that the countess?'

'It *was* the countess! But we must now look to the living; we can yet bring off all who are left alive. Now, dearest, do these garments quickly on, and securely. Wilt have to ride for life, sweet one! Go! I will join you in an instant. Go now with Murtough—he will lead you. Follow them, Torlogh. I go but to bring off the men.

She paused—looked at him wistfully—hesitated—looked at the dead, and obeyed, saying only :—

'You *will* join me, Dermot? You would not deceive me at such a moment!'

'Neither at such a moment nor at any. I go but to bring off Florence. Go with Murtough, beloved, and do, unquestioning,

whatever he advises. You will have to mount Bonnibelle at once; but not to ride till I come to you. Let Torlogh lead a horse down with her for himself. The three blacks are for me, Colonel Desmond, and yourself, Murtough. Keep you the door in hand, while they at once go forward. The men will mount in the stables, as fast as they come in, but not descend till we come; you comprehend, Ellinor, best-beloved!'—and for the first time, he clasped her to his heart, his own. 'Adieu! for a little while; but for a little while adieu!'

She gazed at him fondly; at the dead bitterly—but turned and obeyed his bidding like a little child, and went her way, confiding in his wisdom and the tried faith of the fosterer.

And he, her betrothed, the conquered castellan, the orphan son, he kneeled one moment by the dead—he kissed once more the ashy lips:

'Forgive me, oh, my mother!—forgive me, that I obey even thy bidding!' And springing to his feet, he rushed out of the chapel, without daring to look back; and, crossing the empty court-yard at full speed, rushed up the steps to the esplanade of the ramparts, above the barbican and guard-house of the castle.

There, Florence Desmond, with the sole

relics of the garrison, seventeen men, four of whom were wounded, was firing single guns, with such celerity as to conceal the smallness of their numbers, at the Puritans —who, in a mass, dispirited at the severe check they had met with, were crowded together on the near bank of the ravine, and seemed more than half inclined to fall back on their main-body on the farther side.

Florence saw by his friend's face at once, that all was over, and asked no needless questions. He saw that his noble kinsman was himself, in the full possession of all his noble powers; and with a glance which said to him: 'I know all—I need no explanation,' he added quietly:

'We have suffered terribly, my lord. I think two salvos of six pieces each would send them back across the water quicker than they came. That gun a little lower, Shamus Beg! They have left nearly two hundred men behind them!'

'Let us give them two salvos, then; but let them be of eight guns each. Stand to your guns, my men! But hark you—as fast as you discharge your guns — eight men each salvo, break off, and make your way with all speed to the stables.—There are horses ready; choose you each man a horse. You will find Murtough in the ordnance-vault; await us, and obey his orders!

Now to your guns! First salvo, fire, and away!'

The heavy cannon roared; and, for an instant, the platform was involved in a cloud of white smoke—so dense that not a man could see his neighbour's face—driven back by the light air from the muzzles of the ordnance.

It cleared away; and the eight cannoniers, so promptly had they obeyed orders, were out of sight already; while the enemy, staggered by the heavy volley, were reeling to and fro, in terrible disorder, the officers vainly endeavouring to prevent the men from crossing the ravine, on the farther bank of which reinforcements, with artillery, were seen coming up.

'Let us elevate half-a-dozen guns, Florence, for those fellows on the farther bank, while these lads give their salvo.'

It was done, even while the words were speaking; and again, at the signal, 'Fire, and away!' the second point-blank volley parted; and even before the smoke-wreaths lifted, so that they could again see the enemy, the din and tumult told them that they were in full flight.

It lifted. Dermot and Florence were alone, except one wounded artillerist; and the enemy were jammed in the gorge, horse

and foot, wounded and sound, living and dead, in horrible confusion.

'Give them your gun, my lad, and away after your fellows!'

They were alone—the last—victorious—yet compelled to fly as if defeated. It was bitter—bitter!

'All is over, Florence. She is with her Maker!'

'Amen!' replied the veteran, crossing himself devoutly. 'May we so live, so die, as to join her!'

'Give those fellows a gun, Desmond; they are rallying!'

The piece flashed and roared, and he continued:

'Ellinor is in the vault, mounted ere now, with Torlogh. Murtough O'Brien holds the door in hand. The men are ready in the stables. Go now, good Florence; take the command. Pass the men, one by one, down to the outer gate—not through it. Mount you, and abide with Ellinor. Let Murtough keep the trap for me. I will give these dogs six or eight shot in rapid succession, that they may not suspect we are retreating. At the worst, we must have an hour's fair start. If it were not for the traitor Hugh, who will at once admit them, we might have six. Go, Florence—go!'

"And you will follow me? You are not

ventures pass—and the sense that they are still in the midst of mighty dangers, dispose the minds of men to be gay in despite of grief, and to snatch all the flowers from out the keenest thorns of life.

The third night thereafter they were in safety in the walls of Tredagh, garrisoned by a great force of Ormond's best men, provisioned for many months, and capable, as it was believed, of resisting any force that Cromwell could bring against it, until it should be relieved by Ormond, who was fast gathering head to meet the invader, and drive him, as he boasted, in disgrace across the Irish Sea!

CHAPTER X.

THE ONSLAUGHT.

> "God and the Prophet, Allah Hu!"
> Up to the skies with that wild halloo!
> "For there lies the breach, and the ladders to scale,
> "And your hands on your sabres, and how shall ye fail?"
>
> SIEGE OF CORINTH.

TEN days had passed, and no succour had arrived; yet still, confident in their strength and loyalty, the defenders of the city trembled not.

O'Brien was among the number, and Florence Desmond; the former full of high hope and glorious anticipation, the latter gloomy and desponding. He alone, of all the royal party, appeared to comprehend and know the genius of that wonderful and mighty man against whom they were so unequally fitted.

And it was observed and noted something against the colonel, that when the scurril jokes of Red-nosed Noll, the brewer, were

circulating with the loudest mirth, he ever looked the gravest and most downcast. To all the slang of the day, and bitterness of partisan calumny, he replied only, that he was a consummate leader, as they would soon learn to their cost, who now jeered at him, and a very great, if he were a very bad, man.

Once only he was provoked into saying, when jeered for his gravity and silence, and taunted with fear of Cromwell, 'That when fools were brave, it behooved wise men to be cowards!'—and thereafter they let him alone. For no one wished to try the last conclusions with Colonel Florence Desmond.

He was, moreover, when alone, with O'Brien, most solicitous that he should send Ellinor—who had become his wife the day after their arrival in Tredagh, being given way by the Earl of Ormond himself, before he left the city—out of the town before the approach of the beleaguering force, which was now, on the first of September, close at hand.

But Ellinor was now O'Brien's wife, and having, as she said, obeyed once, contrary to her own will, she was determined, as she said, to abide now with her husband and her brother to the last, whether they would or no.

Dermot, moreover, who had always partaken too much of the cavalier contempt for the Roundheads—contempt most incomprehensible, when we consider that the Roundheads had now, for several years, invariably beaten them—and whose ideas had gained fresh force on that point, by the ease with which, on his retreat from the Red Castle, he had overthrown above twice his number with a mere handful—took sides with Ellinor, and it was useless for the brother to say a word more on the subject. He was, therefore, according to his wont, silent.

On the third of September, at sunset, the dark, solid columns of the Puritans encircled the doomed city, as with a hedge of steel. And the great red flag, with blue edges — the ensign of the covenant —was reflected in the bright waters of the Boyne—bright waters, doomed, alas! so often to be impurpled with the best and most loyal blood of Ireland!

That night Florence and Dermot stood together on the battlements, and watched the ordering of the Roundhead forces, the landing of the heavy guns, the stir and din, yet all grave, and orderly, and stern, of martial preparation.

'Within seven days,' said O'Brien, joyously, 'on yonder hills shall we see the flash of the noble Ormond's banners—and

so mad to tarry, and break all our hearts, for a vain point of honour?'

'Indeed, no. I promised *her*—promised the dead—that I would go. A promise to the dead is very sacred. Go, now, Florence.'

And he went. And shot after shot, in quick succession, the last lord of the Red Castle, its last defender, and the last man on its walls, hurled his defiance and his hate at the Puritan, the Sassenach invaders.

He paused to let the smoke clear off ere he should give them the last parting blow.

To his astonishment, despite of his quick fire, they had rallied, and were recrossing the ravine. As the dropping fire of the castle ceased, they gave a loud, triumphant shout, and charged up the hill.

He gave his parting shot, and saw the leading files go down, like a single man—then looked around him, amazed, for an explanation of the mystery.

It was soon found! Upon the summit of the donjon-keep, stood Hugh O'Neil—where he had been concealed hitherto, none ever knew save he—waving his helmet in the air; for he, too, was armed *cap-a-pie;* and the proud banner of the O'Briens was already lowered, for the first time, over a living lord, before his foes.

But time was not now for vengeance.

Yet as he hurried after his comrades, forgetful that the traitor stood three hundred feet, at least, above him, he discharged a pistol at him, of course harmlessly, in the first burst of indignation.

A moment brought him to the stables, and the ordnance-vaults, just as the last man of the seventeen was filing into the dark cavern; a loud cheery shout from Murtough hailed the chieftain's coming, and, repeated from man to man, as they filed down that gloomy passage, announced to the sad and anxious heart below that he for whom alone it beat was safe—was close at hand.

The stable postern was safe locked behind them. The trap was lowered, and made fast—gate after gate was secured against the pursuers. One fond, short, rapturous embrace, and Dermot sprang to the saddle of his unrivalled barb, and sate, almost himself again, amid the three beings he now loved best of all that breathed upon the round earth's surface—his promised bride, her noble brother, and his own gallant foster-brother. Had she who now lay cold above on the bare altar-stones still sate beside him—nay, had she but been laid to rest beneath those very stones, in honour and in peace, though landless lord, and

houseless castellan—he had, even so, been happy.

But leisure was not given for such thoughts—happily, mercifully, was not given.

Oh! it is well for those, though at the time they believe them not, who, in the anguish—the first crushing anguish—of some mortal sorrow, are forced by the necessities of the living to divert their minds from the dead—compelled by the pressure of the present to look away from the tortures of the past. Oh! it is well for them!—and harder far for those whose seemingly more prosperous state permits them to indulge in sorrow. *Indulge* in sorrow! Who first invented that false phrase never had known—never *could* know—sorrow! Indulge in agony—revel in the pangs of death—then talk of indulgence in sorrow!

Great was the contrast between the cold and death-like gloom of the deep cavern from which they emerged, and the bright, warm sunshine without; but greater was the contrast between the hope that dawned upon their hearts, renewed by the fresh air and free sunshine, and the dark gloom of despair which had so weighed them down during the last anxious hours.

So deep was the glen up which their

road lay, that the slant rays of the evening sun could not so much as reach the flanks of the precipitous rocks which walled it in, although they played and quivered on the green forest-leaves aloft, clothing them with a flood of bright and peaceful glory.

The din of the conflict had sunk to rest, and not a sound was to be heard but the rich carol of the thrushes from the dingles among the crags, and the cooing of the cushats from the deeper recesses of the wood.

The rushing of the stream along the course of which their road lay drowned the trampling of their horses' feet, and the depth of the ravine screened them from the prying eyes of enemies above, if there were enemies, as it was too likely, on the watch already.

At one point only of their progress could they be discovered from any portion of the castle, and then only from the summit of the donjon-keep. That point was where they left the stream, and turned up the bridle-path to the left, among the wooded ridges of Slievh-Buy; and just before they reached this spot, O'Brien halted, and took brief council with Florence Desmond.

'The moment that we begin to ascend the gorge,' he said, pointing directly in front of him, 'we are under the fire of three guns

from the keep, until we reach you thicket, where the road turns, and the rocks cover it. We were best gallop up it at full speed. Take you one side of Ellinor's rein, and I the other. We will lead at a gallop.'

'Is it needful? There can be none there to fire on us; even if any knew how or whither we have gone.'

'O'Neil *was* on the keep when I joined you, and saw us all rush to the stables. To his quick mind, a hint is what a long tale were to another. The guns are always trained on this point, and loaded, though none but I knew wherefore. Of this rest assured: the Puritans, ere this, are in full possession of the keep, and are preparing, even now, to pursue us.'

'You are right!' he replied. 'Would that I had him once within fair sword-stroke. Now, my men,' he continued, as he caught his sister's bridle-rein with his right hand, 'follow us at your speed. Sit firm, and hold him hard, little sister: it is but for a moment.'

The water flashed up from the stream, as they took ground, and the fire-sparks flew from the flinty rock, amid clouds of dust, and the rush of falling pebbles, as the fresh and fiery horses, maddened by the spur, and burning with emulation, one against the other, strained up the craggy pass.

It was but for a moment; yet they *were* seen, as O'Brien had predicted, before they reached the covert of the greenwood. For a loud shout hailed them, and, a second after, the howl of a heavy shot above their heads told them that they were safe at least from that missile, although it struck among the crags not twenty feet above them, and split a mighty oak to shivers.

'Well-missed!—well-missed!' cried O'-Brien, joyously.—'Those fellows can no longer harm us. But, hark!' he added—for the winding of the path they followed had now brought them to a point nearly opposite the entrance of the cavern, whence they emerged, and a dull, distant, rankling roar, sounding like the subterranean thunder, came bellowing from its depths. 'Hark! they are blowing the gates open with petards; we shall have them at our heels ere long!'

'Their horses must be worn out by their night's marching,' said Murtough. 'They will never come within five miles of us.'

'There are some eighty fresh ones in the castle stables; better never cleft the greensward. Think you they have no eyes to see them? They will push us very hard,' he added, quietly; 'but we shall beat them to Carnew: and if Con and Ulick b3 there,

obedient to orders, we will send them home again howling.'

Little was said for well-nigh half-an-hour after these words—the whole energies of every person of that little party being taxed to the utmost to keep their horses at a brisk and steady pace, rarely faster than a trot, so craggy and broken was the ground, without suffering them to fall on the rough ascents or precipitous declivities which varied the surface of the mountain road; though, ever and anon, a fierce and thrilling shout rose from the rear, nigher and nigher each than the last before it, telling that the avenger was upon their traces.

And it was beautiful to see the coolness—the firm, intrepid nerve with which that fair girl ruled her fiery Arab—never so much as trembling once or turning pale, much less slackening her hand on the rein, or averting her eyes from the track, as those fierce and portentous cries burst from the pitiless throats behind them.

Two or three of the soldiers, made of less manly stuff than that delicate beauty, turned and looked back; and one met the reward of his poltroonery; for, unsupported by the master-hand, the horse went down at once, laming itself irretrievably in the fall, and dislocating the rider's shoulder.

To aid him was impossible: to tarry with

him would have been self-destruction. He was abandoned sorrowfully to his fate: and what that fate was they were too soon informed—for ere they had ridden above a quarter of a mile, scaling the heights by abrupt zig-zags, a loud shout, followed by the sound of heavy blows, and one shrill shriek of anguish, reached their ears.

Then, for the first time, Ellinor's lips grew white, and her eyes reeled for a moment; but by a strong exertion she shook off the grievous sickness which was creeping over her, and fixed both eyes and mind on the guidance of her courser.

'Brave girl! Brave Ellinor!' her lover's voice murmured in her ear; and as she raised her full dark eyes till they met his glance of love and admiration, even in that hour of agony she felt a short-lived thrill of rapture. 'Nay, but we will save you yet, my own Ellinor!'

As he uttered the words, they reached the chestnut tree of which he had spoken—a landmark celebrated through the country, and said to be as old as the invasion of Strongbow, standing where four main roads, and no less than five bridle-paths, met.

'Here lies our safety!' he exclaimed, drawing his rein. 'Here we must part, and take different roads. You, Murtough, with ten others, and the page—his horse is the

slightest of the band;—and if they follow by the track, they may take it for the lady's palfry; ride that way through the woods, still bearing to your right, that you join us at nightfall in Carnew. Three more, straight forward and do likewise. Three more, with Shamus Beg to lead them, ride right upon Rathvilly: you will be there to-morrow. Florence, spare not your spurs nor your horse's life. Yon is the straightest way upon Carnew. Leave us, and bring us aid of the quickest—lances!—lances! Now, Ellinor, with me—with me, beloved!'

Not a word was spoken. Implicit, prompt was the obedience—the obedience of love, not of fear—of love and conviction; for Florence would fain have staid beside his sister: but he saw that O'Brien's counsel was the wisest, and that therein lay their only hope of safety; and he, too, wont to lead, obeyed. And it was their only chance—for, not ten minutes had elapsed after they dispersed, before Hugh O'Neil, riding the first, as guide, with some forty or fifty horse, led by a noble-looking youth in full armour, with a crimson scarf, and a crimson feather in his morion, and resembling a cavalier rather than a Puritan, came up to the spot, and were at fault for a moment.

Then, for the first time, did the instinct of love in O'Brien defeat the instinct of

revenge in his base rival. He could not doubt that Dermot would keep the strongest force in hand for the protection of his betrothed; and though he noted the track of the two barbs together, he noted it only as a *ruse de guerre*, and smiled at its want of success, as he announced positively that the leaders were with the stronger party—and led the whole band off on the wrong track, at a canter.

For they had now gained the summit of the ridge, and the rest of the way was favourable to increased rapidity, although the descent was far too abrupt and broken to permit of putting a horse to its speed.

Had the woods now been as thick as on the other side, the safety of the fugitives would have been assured, for they could see the hamlet of Carnew, not above six miles distant, in the open country, at the foot of the mountain chain, and two miles more would have brought them into good galloping-ground.

But before they had gone half the distance, the party led by Murtough was compelled to cross a piece of open ground in full view of those watchful eyes that, seeming to see nothing, took in everything. A loud shot proved to O'Brien that his stratagem was discovered, and an instant afterward he could hear the horse thundering

down a precipitous cross-road which intersected that on which they were riding, about three hundred yards before they reached the open country.

Terrified at the sound, Ellinor would have put her horse to the gallop; but O'Brien, cool, and collected, and an admirable judge of pace—that greatest point in horsemanship—controlled her.

'Steady, steady, dear girl! We shall cross the road ahead of them, and that is all we need. Then we can gallop. Steady, beloved! Let him not break his trot.'

And she did not; but not to do so was a fearful trial. The roads were now nearly parallel, scarce twenty paces intervening between the pursuers and the pursued—but that twenty, fortunately for the latter, impassable with crags and underwood.

Nearer and nearer drew the clang, the shouts, and now the enemy were almost abreast of them; and now Ellinor could discern their helmets and the colours of the plumes, and now their features—the hated features of O'Neil, inflamed with hideous triumph.

'Oh, Dermot! let me gallop!'

'No, no!—for Heaven's sake! Steady one moment longer, and you are safe! There is a terrible pitch there, and some

of them will go down for certain, if they try it at that pace.'

But as he spoke, he loosened his sword in its sheath, cocked both his pistols in his holsters, and drawing one with his right hand, held it ready.

They crossed the mouth of the other road. O'Neil was not twenty paces distant, but another rider was yet nearer—so near that he almost was stretching out his arm to seize the bridle of O'Brien—when, as he had foretold, the horse trod on a rolling stone, went down as if it had been shot, and crushed its rider under it.

'Now ride—ride, Ellinor!—for your life, ride!'

For still O'Neil came on, with fifty Puritans close at his back, shouting, secure of triumph.

With the speed of lightning O'Brien's pistol rose to its level, was discharged, and horse and man, O'Neil went down to the shot. But a proficient in all martial exercises, even in that extremity his skill and quickness saved him. Seeing O'Brien's pistol levelled, and foreseeing that its ball would take effect on his own person, he made his horse so capriole, and so received it in the chest of the animal, instead of his own heart.

But the delay was enough for O'Brien

A minute or two were consumed before O'Neil was rehorsed; and in that minute or two Ellinor had gained full five hundred yards on her pursuers, and Dermot had to spur hard ere he overtook her.

That distance saved them; for, although the Puritans still urged the chase with determination, and were almost as well mounted, they never could make up that gap.

Hillock and hollow vanished under their furious gallop—tree, rock, and bush glanced by as if they were in motion, yet still the beautiful flea-bitten Arab tossed its proud head, snorted with red, expanded nostril, and struggled hot against the rein, as if it had not run a mile. And still the lovely girl sat in her saddle, firm, graceful, easy, as if she had been a portion of that gallant courser, swaying her supple form to suit every bound of the springing steed, and aiding every stride by the support of her light and airy finger.

Miles flew away with minutes, and O'Brien was begining to fear, knowing that Carnew was now close before them that his kinsmen might have failed him, and that he should find no help when help must be had, or never.

But just at that point of time, when his heart was sinking, the tall hat of a cavalier, with its streaming plume, rose above the

swell of the ground to his left, and then a bay barb's head, with a white blaze down his face, and then a stately horseman, sword in hand, reining the horse along at full career.

His fresher and unwearied horse had outstripped Florence Desmond; but he rode the second, and after him, powdering through the dust in long array, some five-and-twenty spears.

They met;—no time for greeting.

'Onward—ride onward, Ellinor! This is no sportive tourney for maidens to behold. On, Ellinor, away! Ride with her, Con—ride, ride, I say! Soh, soh! Now give me a spear, gentlemen. Order your ranks—upon them—charge!'

For, though the Puritans had seen the rescue, confident in the force of their superior numbers, which nearly doubled those of their antagonists, they rode on at full speed, without so much as closing up their ranks or ordering their front to meet that fiery charge.

They had no lances either—and the straggling volley of pistols and musquetoons which they opened irregular, so soon as the O'Briens were within gun-shot, had no more effect to break the onset of that compact and solid body, which charged home like a thunderbolt, than had the rapiers of

the Puritans, to parry the couched lances of the cavaliers.

The eye of O'Brien scanned the ranks eagerly to find O'Neil, but found him not. Although remounted, his fall had shaken him so sorely that he fell into the rear, and when he saw the rescue and the charge of the O'Briens, turned his horse and fled.

Therefore, as the next highest in place, if not in hatred, O'Brien charged his lance against the crimson-feathered leader, who, contrary to the wont of the Puritans, was armed *cap-a-pie*, and wore a helmet with a visor.

Whoever he was, he bore him like a man in the *melée*, and even under the fatal disadvantage of sword to lance, fell not an easy victim.

For, though O'Brien's lance struck him fairly on the gorget, and flew to shivers, up to the very gauntlet-grasp, he still kept his seat, and dealt Dermot a clean cut over his head-piece that made his brain reel and his eyes flash fire. But at the same instant his girths broke, his horse went down, and friend and foe all passed over him.

For the Roundheads stood not an instant. Sixteen or eighteen went down killed or maimed in the first shock; and when the O'Briens' lances broke, their swords flew

out, not without reason, and went up again not without revenge.

For three miles they pursued and slaughtered, till their horses were blown and their arms weary with slaying. If any of their foes escaped, it was by the speed of their own horses, which fatally for the Puritans, they had pressed into service against their own masters.

O'Brien turned his rein the first—love was stronger with him than revenge—and he was trotting slowly back toward the scene of the first onslaught, when sights and sounds met his eyes which made him put to his spurs and ride as hard as ever he rode to meet mortal foe.

Two or three score of ragged youths, half-armed, savage, and desperate rascals and rapparees, the disgrace of native Irish armies, had collected about the carcasses like vultures, plundering and poignarding the wounded. Oaths and shrieks of agony, entreaties for mercy, and wild Irish howls were fearfully commingled, and not a skene but was wet with blood.

Shouting as loudly as he could, and threatening dread vengeance, he came up at the gallop—but the murderers either heard or heeded him not at all.

Just at this moment, the leader, whom he had himself unhorsed, struggled up to his

feet, but was instantly felled by the blow of a club, which made his steel helmet ring like a bell; and in an instant a brawny ruffian knelt on his chest, and the point of a long dirk was already trying the crevices of his gorget, when Dermot's black barb was pulled up beside the group, and a stern voice thundered in the assassin's ear—the last he ever heard on this side eternity:

'Did I not bid thee hold? Shall the O'Brien, then, speak twice? Hold, carrion!'

And ere the words were out, it was carrion to which those words were addressed —for the full sweep of the long Toledo blade took him on the bent neck, and severed the head sheer from the trunk, that fell a corpse on his intended victim.

Dermot sprang from his horse. No lack of ready hands now to hold his stirrup and to catch his rein. He stooped over his captive, and raised him from the ground tenderly.

'Now, by the Holy Virgin, if ye have murthered him, I will hang fifty of you!'

'Thanks to your generosity, my lord!' answered the other, recovering himself; 'they have not murdered me. But it was touch and go! I believe I speak—I believe I am prisoner to the Earl of Thomond,' he added, opening the visor of his helmet, and

showing the fine bold features of a handsome young man of some six or seven and twenty years. 'I am Hen——'

'I seek not, sir,' O'Brien interrupted him, in mid speech, 'to know more than that you are a fallen foe. I pray you, tell me not your name, lest I be forced to act otherwise than I would. I am the Earl of Thomond, r, lieutenant for the King, under his Grace of Ormond. If you were my prisoner, sir, you are so no longer. You are free; and if this act of mine, thus dismissing you in safety, have any power to render this sad war less bloody, I shall hold myself rewarded.'

'If I have aught to say,' replied the other, 'it shall render it less bloody.'

'I doubt you not, sir. But know, as my people's minds are somewhat excitable and rash—for persecution, as you know, drives wise men mad, and these poor caitiffs are not of the wisest—you were best get back to your friends as soon as may be. That is your horse, I think, which they have caught there, and he does not seem to be injured. You had better mount at once, and begone.'

'*Your* horse, you mean, my lord. I have no claim to him, but the worst of all—the claim of the strongest.'

'The best in the world!' answered O'Brien, laughing.—'The best in the

world! *Fortune de guerre! Fortune de guerre!* mine yesterday—yours to-day—perchance mine again to-morrow. But I am in earnest, sir. You were better mount, and ride away as quickly as may be; for these irregular followers of mine, though they now will hold your stirrup, cap in hand, will cut your throat nevertheless skilfully for that, when once my back is turned.'

'In truth, they do seem wondrous adroit cut-throats.'

'Therefore, avoid them, sir. Ho! Florence—ho! I am here!' he shouted, seeing the colonel riding back from the pursuit, at a little distance, and not seeming to notice him; but the colonel still rode on, though he turned his head, and looked at the earl for a moment.

The next minute Ulick came in sight, bloody from spur to plume—bloody with slaughtering—bloody with spurring—with a dozen veteran men-at-arms behind him.

'Ho, Ulick! Find me out two trusty men to guide this gentleman back to the outposts of the enemy, in all honour—men on whom you can rely. These scurvy fellows here would have murdered him, after surrendering, had it not been for a lucky chance, which brought me in, just at the nick of time.'

Two men were soon selected, and the

stranger mounted; but ere he went, he stooped down toward Dermot, who had not yet remounted, and said, impressively:

'We shall meet again, lord earl.'

'I doubt it not, sir.'

'Shall we shake hands on it?' asked the other, in reply.

'I shake no hand which hath blood of Ireland upon it.'

The Puritan cast a glance toward the decapitated corpse of the rapparee, and it seemed as if a retort were rising to his lips.

If it were so, he restrained it, bowed gravely, with a half-melancholy smile, saying:

'I would we could have been friends; nevertheless, I thank you for my life!—I thank you!'—And so he rode away.

Ere long, O'Brien overtook Florence Desmond, who looked at him steadfastly, and aske:

'Know you who that was?'

'I may guess.'

'He did not tell you then?'

'I would not hear him.'

'You did well—and better in dismissing him. Speak of it to no man. Let you and I keep counsel.'

That evening they spent, almost happily, in the wretched little hostelry at Carnew, so singularly do great perils run—great ad-

these canting psalm-singers shall be hurled headlong into the sea!'

'Within nor seven days, nor seventy times seven,' replied Desmond, coolly, 'will any flag of Ormond's show within ten miles of these walls. Nor within seventy times seven years will you see any force, even tenfold its number, that shall hurl back those canting psalm-singers into the sea. Those canting psalm-singers, O'Brien, within ten days, will sweep like the entering tide over the breaches of this doomed city: but I shall not be here to see it. God protect those who are then here! for I foresee such horrors as have never been wrought in a Christian land by Christians. The fist shot fired will kill me—I know it; and I should hail that shot, were it not for the things which I dread for those whom I love more than life—for whom I fear more than I fear death. But we will talk no more of these things. Let us go to Ellinor.'

That evening tidings were brought into the city that a Catholic priest, a Jesuit, had been taken by the Puritans, in lay clothing, endeavouring to force his way into the city, had been tried by drum-head court-martial, and hanged summarily.

Sad hope for the defenders of the city!

The next day it transpired that the priest's name was Daly, called, as the Puritans

would have it, by the idolatrous and Canaanitish title of Ignatius, even a latter type of the arch beast and devil, Loyola.

So they hanged him. Perhaps he deserved to be hanged; but surely not because his name was Ignatius—nor yet because he chose to worship his God after his own manner, and the manner of his fathers.

The Puritans, like most people, were very averse to being hanged themselves, but very fond of hanging other people for exercising the same freedom which they claimed—freedom to worship God;—*videlicet*, the Catholics in Ireland, the Quakers in Connecticut.

And so they hanged Ignatius Daly, and as I said, he certainly deserved it, for the part he had taken in reference to the traitor, Hugh O'Neil—to whose lot, by the way, it fell to superintend the execution of his whilom friend and tutor—a duty which he performed with all the cool, sanctimonious cruelty peculiar to the Puritan, mingled with something of the vindictive zeal which is always seen in the renegado.

It was never known clearly whether the priest was more dupe or knave. In some degree he was both, assuredly. But I believe no instance is on record in all history —none, at least, of which I am aware—of a

Catholic priest betraying his church and his flock to an enemy, since the days, at least, of Orpas of Seville. It is reasonable, therefore, and just, to suppose that it was the selfish thirst of power, the self-conceit of superior wisdom, and the love of tortuous paths, in preference to the straight road, which is so commonly attributed to the Jesuits, and not deliberate treachery, or an intention of wronging his own people, that led the unhappy priest to fall so easily into the snares of the traitor.

But my tale is drawing to a close, and sad is that close, and bloody—almost the bloodiest page in the gory book of human history; and I know not if it be not quite the most horribly hideous: for that blood was all shed, coldly, deliberately, for set plan and purpose of malice aforethought. Therefore, not the lapse of ages shall obliterate, not the waters of Lethe itself wash out, the curse of Cromwell.

Not of the times, but of the man—for the times were refined and merciful; and it had been the boast of a contemporaneous historian, that during all the bloody civil wars of England, though the opposing Englishmen would slay one another sharply enough while both sides stood to it, so soon as the one party turned to fly, the other could not be brought to do execution on the

flyers. Not of the man, but of the sect—for the man was in the main merciful and sparing of blood, except when bloodshedding was imperatively necessary to his career; but the sect, as all sects are in turn when they are dominant and unresisted, was bigotted, fanatical, and barbarous.

But to return to that doomed city. Day after day passed on, quiet and calm, in the horrid hush of expectation. The sun shone brightly on the green fields and the fair river, the fresh and pleasant air dallied with the streamers and ensigns, equally of morose Puritan and fiery cavalier; but the sun showed not, and the breeze stirred not, any banner of his Grace of Ormond, nor came there any tidings of approaching succour.

It was now the ninth of the month, the sixth since that strange conversation had passed between Desmond and O'Brien; and by all that was going forward in the trenches of the enemy when the preceding night fell dark upon the earth, it was apparent that the siege would commence in earnest with the dawn of day.

And so in truth it was; for ere the sun was above the horizon, and while the east was yet scarcely grey, the batteries of Cromwell opened along the whole of the southern and western faces of the works.

On that morning, fully expecting that which was to ensue, the earl and his brother-in-law, now that the time of action had arrived, in better spirits and more cheerful than he had been since the investment, went forth, lightly armed, at an early hour, with the governor, to inspect the works.

These three were standing together, close to the flag-staff, on which, the sun not having as yet risen, the royal colours were not unfurled; the governor, to the right of the three, having his hand on the ensign-staff, which Colonel Desmond, to whose opinion he had shown, throughout, the greatest deference, next to him, then conversing earnestly; and on the left, O'Brien, leaning upon his brother's shoulders, and listening attentively to every word that was passing.

O'Brien was now by far the gravest and most serious of the three—for he remembered the strange words which Florence Desmond seemed to have forgotten, and they weighed upon his heart; for he loved him for his own sake very earnestly; and in every man's—certainly in every Irishman's—heart, there is a touch of something nearly akin to, if it be not, superstition.

While they were standing thus upon the south-western bastion, the drums in the trenches of the Puritans beat to arms, and

at the same moment the great red and blue banner of the covenant soared slowly up to the top of the staff.

'Show them the royal standard, knaves!' exclaimed the govenor, 'since they will have it; trumpets and kettle-drums, God save the king!'

And at his words, amid the splendid symphonies of brazen instruments, up went the glorious blazonry of England's crown.

'Now we shall have it!' exclaimed Desmond; and ere his lips had ceased moving, ten or a dozen flashes leaped out from the trenches, and the smoke, driven out in dense white volumes, rolled lazily along the plain toward the glacis.

Then came the howl and hurtling of the heavy balls — the crash of the masonry beneath their feet, the splintering of the wood above their heads; for one shot had cut the massive ensign-staff in twain, close above the fingers of the governor; and a dozen smote the face of the bastion, three feet or less below the spot where they were standing.

'Good faith! my lord,' said the governor, an old and tried soldier, half-smiling as he said it, 'but that they say two bullets never strike in the same place, I should propose to seek some cooler quarters!'—then turning to the artillerists, who were busy training

the guns—'Bustle,' he shouted, 'bustle, knaves! Answer me this shot speedily, and see if you cannot cut down their red rag yonder. You have a great name for a gunner, Colonel Desmond.'' he added. 'Will you not try a shot for God and the king? But, great heaven! what is this!'

It was most strange; but, in the great excitement of that moment even O'Brien, who was leaning on his shoulder with their arms mutually interlaced, had not, until the governor's words called his attention to his more than friend, perceived or suspected what had happened.

A round shot of the heaviest size had struck him on the right shoulder, dashing the whole of that limb to atoms, and crushing in all the chest and side. Yet he had uttered no sound, given no sign of that agony, save in a convulsive shudder which Dermot afterwards remembered to have felt, though at the time he noted it not.

He was not dead—he was sensible still—he had still strength to stand erect, leaning, as he did, with his left arm on his brother's shoulder. The shock had struck him for a moment speechless. His lips quivered, and his eyes rolled wildly for a moment. But as they made a movement to bear him away, he recovered both power and voice.

'No!' he said firmly. 'No. Here!—I

knew it, O'Brien—did I not?' And he smiled sadly.

Another roar from the ordnance of the Puritans, and again the iron hail smote all around them—and already the masonry at the angle of the bastion began to crumble.

'Governor,' said the wounded man, faintly; 'this cannot last. This bastion will be breached before noon to-morrow. Retrench at once. Begin to retrench inside. Take that church for your *point d'appui!* But I have done with battles. I am going, Lay me in that church, Dermot, until all is over; and as you live, conceal this thing from Ellinor until the siege is ended.'

'Even as you will, Florence, brother. God be with you!

'Be good to her, Dermot; but I know you will. *Ora pro nobis!*'—and he signed himself with the cross—'*sanctissima purissima, ora pro nobis!*'

A third time the dreadful roar of the ordnance burst from the batteries of Cromwell; and as the sound reached the ears of the dying man, the ruling passion strong in death burst forth — indomitable loyalty — loyalty and courage!

Shaking off the support of his brother's arm, he reared his form to its full height, as proudly as though he had been un-

wounded, tore off his steel cap, and waved it in the air toward the lines of the enemy. 'God save the king!' were the last words of that true Catholic and gallant Irishman! Peace to his ashes! Honour to his name —a name that will not soon or easily be forgotten! Peace and renown to Florence Desmond!

Little remains to tell. All that day, all the following night, all the succeeding morning, incessant roared the cannon from the trenches—the cannon from the city; but the latter feebly, inefficiently, and at length singly—the former, faster and fiercer, and more overwhelming every moment.

The angles of the bastions, the parapets, curtain, and counter-scarp went down; before noon there were three wide and yawning breaches; and against these, in three massive columns, was the iron might of the Roundheads rolled forth.

Three separate assaults were given and repulsed at each breach. It needs not to multiply words, for words can supply nothing which the imagination cannot better fill. The picked men of the bravest race on earth were fighting, hand to hand, within a circumscribed and narrow space, with every terrible engine and implement of destruction that human skill had then invented. They were animated by all the

strongest motives that can inflame, invigorate, infuriate the human breast. Political rancor—religious fanaticism—liberty—loyalty—personal hatred—personal interest—all motives high and holy—all motives base and sordid. And the result was, call it what you will, glory or crime—the result was blood and havoc, and the disfiguring of the Creator's image!

In the second and most desperate assault, Hugh O'Neil and the O'Brien met in the *melée*, recognised each other, and never unjoined hands—for each had griped the other by the left—till both their swords being shattered to the hilt, they had fought out that old feud with daggers; till the earl's blade had divorced the foul spirit, choked almost in its flight by its own fearful imprecations, from its dark earthly tabernacle. Double traitor—double apostate—he had no earthly creed in which to die sublimely loyal—no heavenly faith in which to die serenely confidant. He passed, as the good and great had passed before him—whither we know not, and dare not enquire!

At that instant, wounded and spent, and still confused by the long and desperate struggle—scarce conscious that the assailants were repulsed, so thoroughly had he been engrossed in that breathless strife for

life, and death, and vengeance—O'Brien felt himself grappled suddenly by four or five strong men. Overdone as he was, and exhausted and unarmed, all to his dagger—he could at best have offered but small resistance to those vigorous antagonists; taken by surprise, he was easily dragged down the breach—for it seemed to be the object of the men who had fallen on him by concert, to capture, not to injure him—and almost before he had time to think of what had occurred, he was a prisoner in the trenches of the Roundheads.

A few minutes passed, during which his brain reeled, and his senses swam, and everything seemed indistinct and whirling round him—brilliant with strange, prismatic gleams, and blurred with blood. He was weak with loss of blood—weak with pain—weak with misery.

Gradually his senses, his sight returned. He was sitting down in an angle of Cromwell's trenches, with a knot of grim musketeers, leaning on their matchlocks, at some dozen paces distance, and a tall, stately figure, armed *cap-a-pie* in bright steel, with a crimson scarf and plume, standing before, gazing at him, from under the shade of his raised vizor, with a smile half melancholy, half self-complacent.

Perceiving at once that he was seen and

recognised, as the light returned to O'Brien's eyes, and the colour to his cheeks, this person spoke in a frank, cheerful voice, that told of something chivalrous and open in the character of the man.

'You would not know me,' he said, 'the other day, lord earl, when you did me a favour. Will you know me now, when fortune—*fortune de guerre* you know—has put it in my power to return it?'

'I know you very well, sir,' answered O'Brien, 'as I did when I gave you your life, if that was a favour. But if you wish to do me one in return, just draw those fellows yonder up in file, and give them a quick word, and me a steady volley.

'Fie, sir!' replied the young man sternly, and a grave, serious shade fell over his fine open features. 'For shame!—for shame!—a soldier and such cowardly words!—a Christian, and such wicked words! For shame! Let me not hear such!—much less my father, if you chance to meet him;'—and then he half smiled again. 'For he will very surely take you at your word. But hark!—they are beating again to arms! I have no time. First, Dermot O'Brien, Earl of Thomond, give me your parole of honour—rescue or no rescue; you canno refuse me. Then tell me where I shall find Colonel Florence Desmond—and then

where the countess—for I know that you are wedded to the fair lady for whom you fought so gallantly, and cost me so many of my best men. Do this, and I pledge myself that you shall see them both this night in safety.'

'Pledge not yourself, sir, for you cannot fulfil. You will find Colonel Desmond even where you will find my mother—before the high altar of the first church you come to, and if you win the town———'

'There is no *if*,—we shall win it!'

'I may not gainsay you, Master Henry Cromwell. I do not mean to offend; but I know not by what title to address you. But you have cost me very dear!—at our first meeting, a dear mother—at our second a dear brother!'

'At least I have returned you life for life, as earnest of what I will do; and if you will permit, will restore to you this night a wife for whom alone I have captured you. Trust in me, lord earl—trust in me. You will know why to-morrow.'

'I will trust in you, though I know not wherefore. I give you my parole of honour—rescue or no rescue. You will find her in the governor's lodging, in Castle-street, near to the Mill mount; and as you deal with her, so may God do unto you, and much more also!'

'Amen!' replied Henry Cromwell. 'Amen—so be it! Now lead him to my quarters, Nicholson. Treat him with every honour, but let him not go forth. Mount a guard over him with loaded muskets. Let none enter in to him until I return. I make you answerable for him with your life. Fare-you-well, Earl of Thomond. I go to lead the assault, and if I live, I will not fail you!'

He did not fail him. Ere ten o'clock of that horrid night in which Tredagh was taken—in which two thousand men were slaughtered in cold blood, or roasted wilfully to death in God's desecrated temples—in which the kennels of the city streamed with human gore—ere ten o'clock of that horrid night, O'Brien clasped to his heart the living wife, and wept with her, unhindered, over the rescued corpse of the dead brother.

* * * *

Years passed away. The young earl and his lovely bride departed on the very morrow, self-exiled to the hospitable realm of France; and there dwelt, happy and in honour, until the restoration of the second Charles to his hereditary crown restored the Earl of Thomond also to his hereditary lands and honours.

Years passed away, and the gallant son of the great usurper, early called away,

went down to the grave before his mighty sire—and, dying, sealed the doom of his father's blood-bought dynasty. Had Henry Cromwell lived to succeed Oliver, a Cromwell might have now sat on the throne of England. The imbecility of Richard, and not the strength of Charles, produced the restoration. Strange is the course of circumstances! That was not the last revolutionary dynasty destined to fall by the death of the energetic, able heir, while the weak should survive, to be found wanting at the time of trial.

Years passed away, I said; but never, as they came and went, did the O'Brien and his gentle Ellinor fail to give one tear to the memory of Henry Cromwell, so often as they thought upon

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